Wolfman

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Wolfman

by Cadaverish

Summary

Seven dogs from seven bad men; the Biloxi Wolfman was happy slipping into retirement, killing without all the press of his heyday in silence and secrecy. That was, until, the Chesapeake Ripper decided he wanted to play a game with mild mannered Will Graham, no longer the Wolfman but still very much a predator.

Notes

Told from Will's perspective, largely functioning as an inspection of two serial killers locked in battle (and, well, other things). It burns very very slowly but hopefully will pay off. Canon is consistent until Coquilles. Please feel free to nit-pick grammar, spelling, or tell me if you like or hate this thing I have made, or send me recipes or tell me about your day, leave a tasty little kudo, or just hit the back button.

See the end of the work for more notes

Hobbs

Chapter Summary

In which Will remembers himself.

Will Graham, sitting in the dismal beige office before the photographs of eight dead girls, wondered for the umpteenth time just how Jack Crawford became the head of behavioral sciences.

Here he was, a profiler with unprecedented ability, still damp from the depths of obscurity, and who turns up but a successful psychiatrist with a background in surgery (if the hands could be believed) and a taste for antiquated artwork (if his suit could be believed, and Will was less certain about that one). Will was all but positive that he was staring down and to the left of the Chesapeake Ripper's inquiring gaze.

He wanted to laugh, almost.

The Ripper did good work, and if Will were completely honest, he had always been a favorite of Will's. He built his class syllabus around lectures of interesting killers, steeling himself to lecture on the boring, common ones in the dry spaces between. The Chesapeake Ripper was always a high point lecture; studying his crime scene made listening to his student's thinly-disguised dreams of being The One to figure out The Ripper all worth it.

Will afforded the Ripper all of his attention, his vision glazing as his ears picked out the Ripper's steps, the movement of expensive cloth, and the omnipresent Jack hovering obnoxiously in the background. Will felt as if he were a fencer taking up his foil. "You don't like eyes much do you," the Ripper thrusts, "eyes are distracting," he parries "associations come quickly" the Ripper thrusts again, "so do forts," Will parries again. Usually someone is bleeding by now. Will is not sure he likes having such an accomplished opponent. He wonders if he will learn to savor it or if Hannibal will keep moving forwards, forcing him back into a corner not necessarily of his choosing.

The more Will thinks about it though, the more he can't imagine what he stands to lose. The Ripper doesn't hurt dogs, never has before anyway, and living without his other self, the Wolfman, and well out of the statute of limitations on his kills, Will can only lose himself. He's not exactly his own prized possession, and besides, it could be fun. Will hasn't hunted big game in a long time, and never game that was quite this big.

Immediately Will decides to make himself look as vulnerable as possible. The Ripper is too good to take head on, so Will's best option is bait him into showing his hand, and then strike when he is most confident. How Will intends to strike he is not sure of, not yet.

He'll figure it out.

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Lecter turns up in his room at a horrible hour of the morning and Will cannot help but let his exasperation shine through. He hasn't even had a chance to collect himself and arrange his masks and costumes for the day. The Ripper probably intended this his thinks grimly. Lecter calls his food a "protein scramble" and Will files the fact away for later analysis, too caught up in the barrage of questions and his attempts to deflect them in a way that will make sense later, acting as he is before he has properly designed his plan of attack. Thankfully Lecter doesn't seem to be after anything in particular on this occasion, possibly he is just trying to unseat Will. The food is, admittedly, very good.

Will wonders whether Jack sent Lecter to play babysitter or if the Ripper invited himself to the party to get his teeth deeper into an FBI Profiler. Will can't find a graceful way to object to his presence and he can't muster any kind of relish for catching this lesser killer Jack has sent him after when all he wants to do is figure out his situation with regard to the Ripper. The day seems to move past him as he stands motionlessly amidst it. The files drop, the Ripper ducks into the mobile office to make some kind of play to which Will can't adequately respond. He is annoyed and sulking like a child as he kneels in the mud and sweeps files into a box.

The drive to the Hobbs residence is made in silence. The surrounding events abruptly catch up with him as he crosses the threshold and draws his gun. As he puts bullets into the girl hunter, Will's mind can't let go of whether Lecter did this on purpose. Did he want to force Will to kill to put them on a more equal playing field, has he figured Will out and is trying to expose his real nature, or was he already sick of Will and more confidence in Hobbs' abilities than in Will's own? Hobbs falls and Will is awash in too many questions, leaning over the girl he can't get into her head and figure out if she and her father are one and the same killer. Snarling he realizes that to get the answers Jack demands she will have to stay alive and he fastens his hands around the gash in her neck.

Dr. Lecter inserts himself flawlessly into the spray of blood, absolutely at home as a master of life and death. Will is awestruck.

Later, Jack disappoints him again when he doesn't ask Will why he accepts a strange doctor he had just finished disagreeing with not long before. Will can still taste blood on his tongue, can still see the statuesque beauty of the Ripper as he moved through a field of blood meting out judgment on the mortals that lay about him.

Will feels himself, his old true self, begin to stir to wakefulness. He feels wild and so very alive.

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Will goes home to his dogs in whose company he can step out of Will Graham, deliciously vulnerable and dangerously potent profiler for the FBI, and examine the cracks in his façade. He can't be too appealing, the Ripper will smell a trap. So he pushes some belligerence, makes sure his aesthetic is not in line with Ripper's. He will not be a man of sleek suiting, of refined artistic taste. Will's old fishing equipment is in his cabinet, gathering dust. He takes out the old fly-tying equipment, rewinds his fishing line. He will go to his first appointment as a psychiatric patient with the smell of fish clinging to his skin, his shirt creased, the knees of his trousers stained. Lecter will not think of him as a man or an equal, but dismissively, as a tool. One does not worry about a hammer objecting to its task, much less retaliating.

He wonders if this plan is the best as he wades out into the cold water, the dogs gathered on the bank of the river and fumbles his first cast. But it's so different from the homogenous days that have lined up like dominos behind him that even through the chill, the stink, the stiffness in his joints, Will can feel himself beginning to enjoy this earliest stage of his hunt. He lands two good-sized fish much to his own surprise and he guts them slowly, remembering the steps slowly, and makes a point to soak his hands in the fish guts before handing them over to his grateful canines. Later, he cooks the fish meat with minimal seasoning, submerging himself in this new identity of fisherman: one who likes fish, structures his day around obtaining more and then using them to his liking.

Will Graham takes shape before his eyes. A pale, stubborn man who has given up presenting a good face to other people. He is clever, but too willing to trust anyone who treats him kindly. He obeys his own ethical system rigidly, and is vulnerable to pressure on his own behavior if presented as a matter of morals. He is self-sacrificing, self-effacing, and socially inept. He cannot think of anything more tempting for Hannibal Lecter, the Chesapeake Ripper, bane of the FBI and especially the Behavioral Sciences Department, so he steps into this new armor and fastens it about himself snuggly.

His dogs, of course, do not care, they've been with him every step of the way and they know better than to take any of his costumes seriously. Will thinks again how happy he is that he decided to take that first dog home with him, nearly twelve years ago, stepping gingerly around the pool of blood and opening the rickety screen door, so he could lift the too skinny too small dog into the cradle of his arms and carry her away. Despite the fact that all seven of the police reports around those particular murders noticed the missing dog, none of them remarked on it, or made the link. Will didn't have the skill then he does now, really he was lucky that nobody noticed a cadet, then patrolman, acquiring dogs as murder victims lost theirs. But there's another reason he likes dogs, nobody notices them unless they are dog people, and then they only think the best of them.

Will thinks this is a fitting metaphor for his new self. He takes the evening to appreciate his companions, combing them, petting them, and soaking in their combined warmth in the gathering dark.

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Lecter's office is as blatant as it could be without shouting a confession. The doctor gestures for him to enter and Will feels a quiver of delight as being shown into a sanctum of the Ripper. His new armor is attached well, and while he is quivering delightedly inside it, the armor translates the movement into the fidget of anxiety. Will scales the ladder to the overhead library immediately, his armor makes it a movement of escape, he appreciates the vantage point. Lecter takes this initial retreat into stride, using slow measured movements to close the heavy door and move to his desk. Will is reading book titles at a feverish pace, hoarding these little snippets and slipping them into his profile of the Ripper.

The Ripper makes his first move. He is waiving Will's evaluation, both ensuring Will returns to the field to be subjected to psychological pressure, and establishing himself as a refuge against Jack Crawford and people like him who are all too willing to see the strangeness in Will. Ostensibly he is a refuge against the horror of Will's gift. Will reflects again just how out of his depth he is, still slow and awkward with the weight of the years since he was at his zenith. The Ripper is in his prime, an accomplished and practicing predator and he is demonstrating his ability and subtlety with a finesse that is staggering. Will is practically drooling with excitement. His armor swallows nervously and makes sure to block eye contact with the rims of his glasses.

They talk for a while like that, Will peering down from his defenses behind the railing, Lecter relaxing against his desk and looking up as if this were a perfectly natural way to conduct an interview. Lecter is keeping him off the record. Will finds himself having to react positively as yet another noose drops around his neck, all his outward persona can see is the liberty to

leave when he wants, another official regulation to which he will not be beholden. But inside looking out, Will sees this for what it really is, he knows Lecter is now free to discuss him as a patient with anyone at any time. Lecter is not subject to the ethics of his various board memberships and licenses. Will feels his available actions falling away. He is realizing the ease with which Lecter played him while on the trail of Gareth Jacob Hobbs was not due wholly to his being taken off guard, Lecter is just that good.

Lecter is trying to bind him up with Abigail Hobbs. Will imagines this would be very effective if he hadn't just kept the Hobbs child alive for Jack. Will can see this snare much more clearly than the others and he thinks he can slip this one without jeopardizing his new disguise overmuch. Lecter says that he, too, "feels a staggering amount of obligation." Will feels unaccountably paranoid at that, the Ripper is announcing his new pawn on the board, not an outright attack on Will himself. Will can't help but feel he should've let her die. He considers killing her and wonders if he can do it without getting caught.

Still his outward self is feeling better all the time, falling for Lecter's act effortlessly and eventually Will moves down the ladder to the balcony library and allows the Ripper to place him into a chair and take the one opposite him. Will feels as if he is taking the chair in a hungry tiger's cage. They accomplish little else and Will leaves feeling jumpy and sharp.

Stammets

Chapter Summary

In which Will has cause for concern.

Will stands in a forest, contemplating a neat line of graves. Jack's team have already removed most of the bodies, and the moist earth is fragrant and fecund. Will wants to spit with boredom. He wants to lay on the ground and let the weight of his unadulterated apathy press into him. Jack speculates aloud in his adorable idiocy. Will cannot answer him because if he has to stand in the mycophile's banal skull a moment longer he thinks he really will need Dr. Lecter's therapy. Jack takes this as confirmation that it is indeed a difficult case and Will is as stumped as he is.

This is when things go horribly wrong.

Gareth Jacob Hobbs is staring up at Will from a grave that had been empty only moments before. His eyes are glassed over in death but his smile is lively enough for both of them. Will has never in his life experienced a hallucination besides the ordinary hypnogogic starts, certainly never a fully visual manifestation. Behind him a camera flashes and Will feels as if he is floating, severed from his flesh and blood and rising above the ground. He stumbles backwards before he can faint and suddenly the ground is alive as a corpse not yet removed seizes in the soil. Will sits on the ground, feeling the water in the soil seep through his cheap jeans, and desperately hopes that he is dreaming.

Jack gets him to his feet and Will basks in the reassuring familiarity of breathing, swallowing.

The question then becomes whether he will tell the Ripper about what happened. On the one hand, he is a more perfect lure as a man who is genuinely scared and confused. On the other hand, Lecter, unbound by confidentiality regulations, can share this new crack in his armor with anybody. What it comes down to, Will muses, is whether Lecter has more use for him sane or crazy. Will wonders then if he has more use for himself sane or crazy. He will tell Lecter he decides, if only to see what he will do, after all Will thinks feeling a giggle rising in his throat, the Chesapeake Ripper is a medical doctor and a licensed psychiatrist.

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Lecter tells him that his hallucination is the result of stress, nothing more. Will's heart sinks because he knows immediately that Lecter is lying to him, but there's nothing he can do but let Lecter's game play out. Will only hopes he can recover some kind of benefit from this whole fiasco. Lecter moves on to the boring man, the gardener.

Will curls up inside himself and lets the armor he has built for himself move like a hideous automaton through the paces of confusion, interest, revelation as Lecter talks about a desire for connection, an obsession with a mushroom's ability to reach out. Distantly Will approves of the doctor's keen mind and wishes Jack could be so useful. All that he says meshes with what Will had decided earlier, but listening to another person say it with carefully measured words clarifies it for him. Will allows himself to imagine that they are a pair of people who respect each other and are working to a similar goal. That either one of them wouldn't have hung the other in his basement to kick and scream himself hoarse until he died of blood loss or dehydration.

Then Lecter starts to maneuver Will closer to Abigail again, trying to stir some latent paternal instinct that Will knows does not exist within him and Will is bored again. He wonders if he could get a second opinion with a different psychiatrist, not Alana who favors Lector so much, and throw Lecter down into the pit of medical disgrace. If that would make the Ripper more bloody in vengeance or make him dry up as he tries to gather his resources back underneath him, or if the Ripper would simply vanish to acquire a new presence in a new place. Will relegates his speculation to a box marked last resort within himself. It feels dry, tasteless, without savor to attack the Ripper in such a superficial manner.

He wonders, for the thousandth time, if the Ripper as a man has any weaknesses.

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Jack's team follows the mushroom gardener to a chain pharmacy on the trail of missing diabetics. The pharmacist, Stammets, is long gone of course but he left them a breathing female already sinking into the soil that fills his trunk. He must have terrible gas mileage Will thinks absently as he levers the girl out of the dirt. Jack is predictably distracted by the absent gardener, but the emergency staff that accepts the survivor from Will seem so thankful that at

least one made it. They must belong to the same company that transported the corpses from the last garden.

Will is ready to go home to his dogs, his own innocent survivors, but already Beverly Katz is pushing a laptop monitor into his face. Jack is very angry. Will himself thinks he might be a little angry. Not least because he can't unilaterally deny this Freddie Lounds' allegations of his madness. His jaw twitches with equal parts annoyance, sorrow, and fear.

Will thinks maybe he should feel grateful to Lecter, he hasn't felt so strongly since he was a teenager in Louisiana.

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Embracing Lecter's design is freeing in a way, Will has to cling to the faith that eventually he will lull Lecter into a state of complacency perfect enough that an opportunity will appear. This is how Will finds himself walking down the glaring white hallway to check on Abigail Hobbs' condition. He hasn't yet decided whether he will disrupt her air supply or introduce a toxin into her IV.

Abigail must be the luckiest girl in the world because it is precisely then that Jack Crawford's name lights up his cellphone and Will picks up to hear that Stammets knows about Abigail and his supposed connection to her. Will is so ready to take this little gardener out of the picture and move on to someone, anyone, else. This was supposed to be a nice day of contemplating homicide over the body of a sleeping girl, not running and yelling and pretending to care.

He finds Stammets some floors down, already wheeling Abigail towards an exit. Will's gun is out, but Stammets is backing away. The corridor is blissfully vacant so Will kicks Stammets in the thigh, sending the big muscles there into spasm and toppling Stammets towards him. Will gets the muzzle of his gun up against the pharmacist's chest and fires a single shot that takes them both to the ground, Stammets bleeding steadily over his jacket. Will lets the warm, sticky blood irredeemably stain his jacket and feels peaceful, buoyant; the familiarity of death and the reek of iron relaxing him better than any quantity of whiskey.
Then, all at once, it is Gareth Jacob Hobbs on top of him, so close he might kiss Will by turning his head even a little. As ever he is grinning toothily, but today his eyes are sharp and so very blue. Will writhes wildly, shoving the dead man off of his body and scrabbling back against the opposite wall breathing hard. He registers Jack running down the hall accompanied by a staff of doctors and nurses, but he cannot take his eyes off of Hobbs who is laughing wetly around the hole in his chest.

Jack moves to help him stand in sharp parallel to Will's episode in the forest, but Will waves him off, pushing himself up the smooth wall of the hospital corridor. Hobbs senior and younger are surrounded by medical staff and when a doctor pronounces death and moves away, it is Stammets lying there pale and limp. Jack is asking him what happened and Will mumbles something like "he came at me, I startled him wheeling Abigail towards the door and he came at me," and all the while Will's eyes track Stammets body as he is loaded onto a gurney and pushed away.

Abruptly he remembers himself and asks after Abigail. Of course the trying girl is still alive, all of her life support equipment more or less functioning. Will is beginning to think his bad luck pushes the bounds of natural chance. Maybe the Ripper has some kind of deity watching over him. He supposes venomously that she will make a full recovery.

Someone is laying a blanket around his shoulders and urging him to sit down. Will shakes them off, agrees that yes of course he will call Dr. Lecter. No, he doesn't feel light headed he just wants to go home and sleep. He feels as if he is pushing through the underbrush of a dense jungle instead of the concerns of well-meaning medical and FBI staff.

Sitting in the car he realizes he forgot to return the shock blanket and he has to slink back into the hospital to return it. By then the staff have forgotten all about him and he is able to awkwardly stuff it into an abandoned laundry basket and leave before Jack notices him.

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Will returns home and separates the false wall in his closet from the frame around it. There are his old knives, wicked single-edged gently curving things he had found in a house the other children of Biloxi had sworn up and down had belonged to a witch. Will doesn't know whether or not she was, but the knives have been good companions for many years. They are always thirsty and settle into hands with reassuring familiarity. He lies down in his bed with his arms outstretched at his sides and hands still clutching his knives.

Will cannot say for sure whether he fell asleep or simply faded from conscious attention to the physical world, but when he is next aware the sun is setting. His hands are still wrapped around the handles of the knives. He sets them gently on the nightstand and returns to his still dismantled closet. There he retrieves his holster, an affair of rough leather he had sewn together himself. It holds the knives flat to the small of his back and when he shrugs on a jacket over his shirt, they vanish from view entirely. Will consults the tattered notebook

wedged between wall supports, finds the name of a graduate professor who had produced a variety of crush videos in her youth.

The Biloxi Wolfman is no vigilante; he is indulging himself and he knows it, but he views the feeling of doing some good for an animal besides as a bonus and appreciates the help in compiling his list of targets. Perhaps it would even distract some erstwhile young profiler someday.

The professor, now well into her forties, lives a few hours west and Will drives to her rural home in silence. To some extent this is an experiment. If Garrett Jacob Hobbs appears before him again, Will can assume his presence has been associated with murder in his psyche. If he doesn't, Will can assume his mind is trying to tell him something more significant. If Will can find no consistent standard, he will have to accept that he has become sick.

It's late when Will arrives in Kentucky and he is pleased when he picks the lock easily, even with his surgical gloves on. That much, at least, he hasn't lost. The professor's children are in bed, her husband is asleep behind her. Will seals his hand over nose and mouth with one hand and with the other hauls her out of bed before she can really begin thrashing. Pulling her against him he introduces his first knife into the space between her ribs. She faints from the pain and Will elects to haul her downstairs by the friction of her flesh and his knife alone. Standing in the living room he waits patiently for the occlusion of her airway to kill her.

Draping her over the coffee table for convenience more than anything else he steals back upstairs, and retrieves a pair of gratifyingly high heels, then returns to her body. Neither her husband nor her children ever stir. He stands over her body for a good few minutes, daring Gareth Jacob Hobbs to appear. He remains stubbornly absent so Will sinks the heels threw the professor's eyes and leaves the shoes to hang over her face without much further ceremony. He admires her for a while then decides he couldn't bear being dragged to Kentucky by Jack to investigate his own murder. He heaves the professor, heels and all, up over his shoulder then carries her out to his car, and wrapping her in a tarp, he tucks her into his trunk. On the road back through West Virginia, he finds a promisingly untended pond and the professor, her shoes, and a number of large rocks are sewn hastily into the tarp and Will prods her out into the dark water with the use of a fallen branch.

He returns to his car and drives home in a good mood, playing the radio and singing along, enjoying the firm pressure of his knives against his back and the wind from the cracked open window against his cheeks.

O'Halloran

Chapter Summary

In which Freddie antagonizes, Alana discerns, and Abigail vexes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alana comes to visit him the next morning. He has been asleep for maybe two hours when she comes banging on his door and this is how he justifies staggering to meet the morning light in his underpants. Alana takes his unclothed state in stride, claiming she grew used to the male anatomy with her brothers but probably because she just has no sexual attraction to him. Will appreciates her good taste. He offers her coffee and she kneels to pet his dogs. Handing her coffee, Will manages a tight smile, but it falls away quickly when she tells him that Abigail Hobbs just woke up. Will supposes he will have to talk to her, but Alana quickly absolves him of any immediate responsibility by reminding him it might be traumatic to have either him or Doctor Lecter present right away. When she leaves, Will's sleep is fitful and he wakes still feeling tired.

Will is left in peace for nearly a week. He goes to class, he fishes to keep the smell strong around him, he plays with the dogs. Garrett Jacob Hobbs does not appear to him, something which at first improves his mood and then only makes him more anxious as the week wears on. Why would he have such a clear hallucination so many times in such a short time frame and then nothing for such a long time afterward? Lecter was a gifted manipulator, probably the best Will had ever met, but even he couldn't conjure apparitions from the ether.

Will considers what he will do about Abigail Hobbs. If she hadn't helped her father on his hunts he could feel free to act paternalistically at first and then allow himself to become more distant as she recovered, finally vanishing from her life all together. But if she had helped daddy with his dirty deeds, as Will suspected, things became a little more complicated.

Another of Lecter's snares became clear. Because Lecter had bound him up with her, insisting that he feel paternal and guilty about his role in her shooting, he now would be locked into acting as her champion rather than her jailer. He hoped his portrayal of himself as cripplingly socially dysfunctional could keep him at least a little distant from her affairs and thereby from the Ripper's machinations.

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Of course he could only avoid the situation for so long. Dr. Lecter arrived on his doorstep (and wasn't that a surreal moment, Lecter's sharp edged suit in sharp collision with Will's soft and comfortable house and his soft and comfortable dogs) asking if Will would like to join him in visiting Abigail at her treatment facility. No choice actually existed, of course, but Will made a show of sipping his coffee thoughtfully and gazing out into the marsh. Lecter indulged him, but didn't seem at all surprised or relieved when Will eventually agreed.

Walking inside the facility was like a moving through a waking nightmare. Will had spent most of his adult life trying to prevent his ever being confined to a place like this. Being committed had been threatened twice before, once when his father had died and again after he hadn't shot that drug dealer while on the force in New Orleans.

Lecter signed them in and led him through seeming miles of pale green hallways. Nearing Abigail's room, they could hear the sound of two women talking. Instinctively Will's pace slowed and it was no surprise to him when Lecter dropped back with him. Will had to work not to make his footfalls as quiet as he instinctively wanted to; Will Graham had no reason to have experience walking so silently.

A woman with a shock of alarmingly red hair had pulled her chair up to the edge of Abigail's bed. She was leaning forward to press her face even closer and Abigail sat that much straighter to keep as far away as she could while staying in the bed. The woman is explaining to Abigail that Will is insane. Ordinarily he would feel amused but with the specter of Garrett Jacob Hobbs looking over his shoulder, he feels threatened. He speaks too harshly from where he is leaning against the doorway, and Abigail's head jerks up to stare at him with watery blue eyes. Lecter says nothing at his shoulder. Will realizes, as the woman shoves a digital camera into her purse that this must be the ever verbose Freddie Lounds, but she isn't looking at him, she is staring over his shoulder at Hannibal. Will tastes fear, ashy and cool, and realizes they had met before. Does Freddie know she is looking at the most prolific serial killer in recent American history? Will cannot imagine she would still be alive if she had made the requisite jumps in Lecter's presence, but she leaves in such a hurry that he must have done something.

Abigail has focused her attention on the pair of them now, watching him with enough confidence that she hasn't taken Lounds' words of caution to heart. Pity, Will thinks, she really should. He would like nothing more than to bury his knives in between her ribs and push her into a deep, dark hole. Lecter suggests a walk through the pitiful garden that festers in quiet abandonment behind the facility. The greenhouse is in better shape and Will pays more attention to the sweet smell of fresh soil than he does to the platitudes that rush between

his lips. Abigail, just as he hoped, is rapidly becoming bored with him and focusing on Lecter. Will knows he has no chance to wrest her from Lecter's control, his only hope is to submerge himself beneath the scope of her notice, but he knows that he is merely playing for time.

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Will and Lecter are leaving the facility amidst a hail of autumn leaves. Freddie Lounds has the gall to be waiting for them, leaning against the hood of her car as casually as if she were waiting for a boyfriend. Will cannot recall a person he has wanted to kill more. He wonders if it is brilliance or dumb luck that has taken her so completely out of his grasp, but she is quite possibly the person he could least get away with murdering. She starts to attempt working another dagger against him, this time garden variety blackmail.

This is when Will makes a mistake.

He knows his quip about "pissing off somebody who thinks about killing people for a living" is going to be on Tattlecrime within the day. Lounds does not disappoint. She is now absolutely the last person Will Graham can kill if he has any prayer of sleeping in a room without bars ever again. He sits at a table with his laptop, running the pad of his thumb over his lips as he reads her article. His dogs are whining and he gets up to feed them feeling like a man submerged in water.

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When Will asks the Ripper to watch his dogs for him, he can't decide if it's sadism, masochism, or garden-variety curiosity. By now he is confident the Ripper is still too early in his game to hurt any of Will's dogs, even for experimental purposes. He is also nearly positive that the Ripper cannot resist altering his living environment, either as a marking behavior or as another play against Will's psychic well-being. Will sits on the plane, feeling his knees cramp because the FBI won't spring for a ticket affording more leg room, and reviews the layout of the dust in his house behind his eyelids.

Will sits at a dinner table. He is uncertain that he likes the feeling of empathizing with a

child. On the one hand, the world is so much simpler than it has been for so long. On the other hand he feels very small and very soft. He doesn't know how to anticipate the threats around him. He makes his conclusions with narrow literacy. It is a confining, terrifying feeling.

Jack is unwilling to accept Will's conclusion that the middle son of this family is the murderer they are looking for: even when Will expresses himself with as much delicacy and clarity as he can, Jack is still getting ready to go hunting for a kidnapper, not a kidnapped child. Will supposes he can't blame Jack, children have always come close to dogs in Will's estimation. Still, Will has set Jack's team on a trail paved with the side of milk cartons and he leaves work feeling more purposeful than usual. He takes the feeling along with him to Lecter's office, sitting in the tiny antechamber turned waiting room with his thoughts quiet, ready for whatever small cruelties the Ripper brings with him today.

Will is ready for the question about his mother. He had been expecting some comment about his house or his dogs, but today Lecter is playing at being all business and directs his focus back to the kidnapping case, or ostensibly does while turning those bloody eyes towards Will's family. Will thinks maybe that the Ripper is starting to get bored with him.

The Ripper's parents died when he was young, Will wants to laugh until he's screaming. He isn't lying when he says family feels foreign, his father did the best he could but they were never close. Will always got the sense his therapist was more upset about his father's death than he was himself. But the Ripper, oh no, the Ripper is a serial killer right out of American media, the product of some trauma deep in his past, family trauma if Will is reading everything correctly. Not the sort of Hitchcock, no pattern of abuse that Will can see, but the deaths of his parents are the most significant data point any Ripper profile has ever been afforded. Pity he can't write a paper about it just yet.

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Will wakes up to his own voice talking to Beverly about Ritalin. It feels like being punched in the heart, when he realizes he has been speaking without his conscious permission. Looking around the room he half expects to see Garrett Jacob Hobbs giggling like a hyena, but the classroom is dark and quiet, he and Beverly illuminated by auxiliary lighting and the glow of his monitor. Will has certainly been neglecting his sleep requirements in the midst of classes and the serial kidnapper. But Will has never been very good at a regular eight hours a night sleep schedule and he has never in his life, not even in police academy, fallen asleep sitting up with his eyes open without realizing it, much less spoken to someone while he was sleeping. He hopes, desperately, that he really is sick.

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Jack's team draws up a geographic pattern of murders involving families with missing children, and cross-references it with a list of missing children. They find a likely target and Jack calls in the local police department's SWAT team, sweeping down upon a gratingly charming subdivision like a plague of armored black locusts.

The family is dropped to the ground and one of the children takes off running into the yard, Will follows at his heels, coming up short when the child turns and draws a gun on him. Any adult, Will would kill immediately as a matter of policy. But the child is still round cheeked, pale and hollow eyed now, but small with chubby fingers and hair as unruly as Will's. Will feels unaccountably furious with the banal woman wearing a few sheep worth of knitwear who steps out of the shadows and rests her own pistol against the child's chest as his knees shake and his aim wavers.

Out of the corner of his eye he sees Beverly lining up to take the shot on the kidnapper. Will's shot beats her to it, drilling a neat hole into her forehead. Christopher sits down heavily when she collapses, the blood soaking into his sneakers, his jeans, and flowing into the wells between his fingers. Will standing over him, watching. Garret Jacob Hobbs is not there. Will grips the child's hand and pulls him to his feet, he looks into the boy's eyes for a few long minutes before turning him into the grip of a nearby officer. Once upon a time that officer might have been him.

Chapter End Notes

Because who can resist a serial killer with standards right.

Buddish

Chapter Summary

In which Will draws a clock.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Will wakes up to flashing lights, feet stinging like they're on fire, in the middle of the road, he seriously begins to consider surrender. Hannibal will kill him and that's hardly terrible, but what is terrible is his own body taking control away from him. Looking around himself and being unable to tell whether he's awake.

Standing across from Hannibal in the grey dawn light filtering through his kitchen windows with the smell of coffee filling his nose, Will has only two thoughts: one is that the Ripper is finally interested in him again and the game isn't over yet, the other is that Hannibal may be incapable of wearing a shirt without a collar. Will can see the barest hint of curling chest hair at below his collar bone and is again struck by the Ripper having a physical flesh and blood body. He'd spent so long imagining him as a faceless ideal that it was startling to see his pores, his eyelashes, the folds of skin at his neck. Will was suddenly beset by the question of what, exactly, the Ripper's penis looked like. He huffed a laugh into Lecter's fancy glass mug, hoping desperately that he passes it off as the other Will's self-deprecating humor.

-x-

Jack tells him that he has a crime scene best described as "soup". It suits Will, he's feeling impatient and indolent in equal measure, he wants a murderer he can really sink his teeth into and the Ripper hasn't been very willing to oblige, lately. He wants to smile when he sees the praying figures, he wants to suck little pieces of skin from their exposed spines. He settles for laying on the bed, where the killer must have lain. He is disappointed when he sees the vomit, the regret.

The killer's mind is familiar in the worst way possible. Everything is slightly off, everything is hot and tight and wrong. The man is sick, he isn't a visionary, he isn't the artist that Will wanted. Will drags himself out of the killer, eyes snapping open much earlier than the science

team anticipated, they look confused when he staggers out of the room looking pale, maybe a little green around the edges. He tells Jack about the man's illness, mind working overtime. He was sick, Hobbs wasn't the product of his own madness he was the product of a disease. Lecter had been lying to him and curse him for a fool he had believed him. Graham had miscalculated that the Ripper wanted him alive and crazy instead of sick and dying. The question remained, what to do about it. He couldn't get to any useful doctor without a referral and Lecter almost certainly wouldn't give him one. Maybe last week Will would've been amenable to allowing Lecter to play his game, tip his hand a little more, but the Ripper is getting bored. He is preparing something with Abigail that will take Will out of the game. So Will needs to set him off balance.

Alana answers the phone sounding tired, and worried. He asks if he could take her to lunch, a thank you for putting up with him. Alana accepts graciously, as he knew she would, and they murmur pleasantries to each other before disconnecting.

When they meet he spins a few anecdotes about his dogs, absolutely indifferent to the marinated artichoke hearts between them but eating out of habit. Alana asks him how work is going, predictable as the ocean tides. He tells her about how it's been getting harder, how he feels off. He makes a great show of waiting until none of the servers are around, and then he tells her in a hushed whisper ripped right off a sordid soap-opera, that sometimes he sees things.

Alana draws back with almost comically wide eyes, and Will would've laughed if he didn't feel something so close to fear. The only thing worse than an unknowable thing, Will thinks as he tells her about Hobbs, is a thing you thought you could count on suddenly becoming uncertain.

Across from him, Alana is watching him rubbing the fingers of one hand across the back of the other. Abruptly she leans across the table and for one terrifying second Will thinks he has grabbed her hand and broken her arm, but when he opens his already open eyes, she is simply resting her hand against his forehead, her soft belly pressed against the harsh edge of the table in a way that makes her cleavage pop forward. "You're warm," she tells him, her tone fading from concerned to considering. Sitting back she tugs her purse into her lap and produces a pale teal notebook and a silvery pen with a little butterfly handing from the butt of it by a little chain. "Would you indulge me and draw me a clock?"

"A what?"

"A clock face. All twelve numbers."

"What time," he drawls, accepting the notebook and the pen and sketching out a circle with its little ticks around the edge.

“Right now,” she tells him in a voice like velvet, watching him draw and smiling tightly.

He hands her the notebook and she looks at it for a long moment, as if she has never seen a clock. She turns the notebook back towards him “this looks right to you?” she asks him.

“It’s a clock, Alana,” he tells her dryly.

“No,” she’s laughing but tears are streaming down her cheeks, Will feels equal parts uncomfortable and fascinated, “no it isn’t. Will I think you have encephalitis.”

“What?” he asks, dumbfounded as if the rug has been tugged out from under him.

Alana drops money on the table to pay for their food and stands, extending her slim hand to him. “I’ve got a friend in the neurology department of the hospital,” she says smiling, “let’s go see if he can squeeze you in.”

“Would you do me a favor,” he asks her as he eases himself into her car, “don’t tell Jack. Don’t tell Dr. Lecter. I don’t need people’s noses in my medical records.”

Alana nods her head shakily, the flow of tears finally receding. “Yeah Will I can do that. You are going to tell Dr. Lecter though?”

“Oh, yes,” Will says, “oh yes I’ll tell him.”

-x-

Alana’s friend can squeeze him in and Will thinks this is the first time in his life he’s been happy to lay in a hospital bed and feel the pinch of a plastic tube lodged into his elbow. The drugs make his stomach hurt and he feels weak and shaky, but when the nurses come in to check on him they look like themselves instead of a dead cannibal. He listens to his own heart rate and smells the sharp reek of disinfectant and he feels like for the first time in a while he is winning.

-x-

Will has been out of the hospital for a week when Jack finds a new angel for Will to look at and Will has an excuse to make an appointment with Doctor Lecter. Sitting in his obnoxiously expensive chair, Will thinks about the story of Bluebeard and the inability to close cognitive doors once they've been open. He can't stop seeing the Ripper as a biological animal now and take delight in noting the wetness of his corneas, the tendons that stand out on the backs of his hands.

Because Will is there, ostensibly, to talk about Buddish, he has to pretend that the man and his pathology are in any way interesting. The game gets old quickly and he rises impulsively to stare out the high window, watching leaves falling from the big maple across the street. Lecter follows him and the tone of his voice suggests delicate reprimand for running away from a subject, but Will is too bored to hear the words. He is bored until the precise moment that the Ripper strains his head just the smallest distance forward and inhales deeply.

So that's how he knew. Will supposes that his willingness to believe that Dr. Hannibal Lecter can smell encephalitis does not speak especially well for the completeness of his recovery and really, Will himself can't justify his own belief in Lecter's nose, but he brands it into his mental profile of the Ripper.

"Sorry," he says turning to face Lecter dead on, "I know it's a terrible smell, but it's my dad's old favorite brand." He smiles apologetically and watches Lecter's eyes catch fire with interest. And there it is, Lecter has shown at least a small bit of his hand. He sees a bright and shining agent for order and goodness and Lecter seeks to tear him down and make him dark and twisted. Will amends his mental note about family trauma in his Ripper profile. He wonders sardonically if the Ripper has ever indulged in devil and angel roleplay in the bedroom.

He thanks Dr. Lecter for all his 'help' and shuts the office door behind him trying hard not to think about the prostitutes of New Orleans in tight red shorts and little plastic horns. As fun as it would be to see Dr. Lecter brought down a few pegs, Will would never disrespect the Ripper so thoroughly. There's something sacrilegious about the mental image, and wouldn't Lecter just love it if he told him that in the next session.

-x-

Will has always liked barns and he relishes the dust and hay smell of the air around the body of the angel maker. There haven't been animals there in a long while, unfortunately, but the air is warm and the dusty air makes the sunlight filtering between the boards into golden lances.

That it's Buddish is no question. Will looks at the body and feels the familiar constriction of his mind, the sick hot swamp of his disease. He tells Jack as much, leaving it to him to wonder who strung up the newly fashioned angel. Lecter wouldn't dirty his hands, Will thinks, and brushes the thought aside with irritation, he's been thinking about the doctor too much.

"Think I need a break, Jack," Will says aloud and though Jack blusters and fusses, he grudgingly allows Will some time to himself. Will is glad, he wants to be himself for a while. Feel his own knives instead of the Ripper's scalpels under his fingertips. Sink his teeth into his own prey instead of the Rippers. He needs space. And, he thinks mournfully, it's been some time since he covered himself in the smell of fish.

Chapter End Notes

So many thanks for your comments kudos and attention!

Gideon

Chapter Summary

In which Will has an epiphany.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will hadn't chosen this particular man for any particular reason. He drove past his house on the way to the New Orleans Police Department every day, past his three confederate flags, his crumbling porch and his emaciated dog, and Will decided to kill him. Folks in that part of the world tended to rely more on shotguns than locks, so Will kept an eye on a liquor shop he knew the man went into for his special brew waiting in his squad car parked in an old reliable speed trap across the way, until the man emerged one day with a promisingly large brown paper bag.

That night Will crept up the back porch in old, cheap sneakers. He didn't carry much, a makeshift set of lockpicks, the knives he had found so many years ago, his gloves. The man certainly had his old shotgun, the butt loosely held in one hand, but he also had an empty bottle of Johnny Walker Blue in the other, and Will walked right up to him and the man didn't so much as stir. The knife slipped between his ribs so neatly, so cleanly that Will had to tear it out the other side and see the jagged bloody hole he had wanted. The man died almost immediately, living just long enough to open his mouth to scream, and Will was so annoyed that he would ruin such a transcendent moment that he took the man's jaw clean off with a few hacks of his other blade. He watched the blood spurt out, first quickly then slowing down, welling up and dripping in fat red drops, then just seeping into the dirty white tank top. Will put his gloved hands into the puddle felt the rapidly fading warmth, and dragged his fingers through it experimenting with the stick and slide.

A noise from the back door had Will out of the puddle and back in the shadows in a blink, his heart beating like hummingbird wings, but it was the old man's dog, big eyed and tragic, scraping stubby nails against the screen door. Will stared at her, she stared back. After a moment, her tail began to wag and she pawed at the door again. The moment burned itself into his brain and Will was too overwhelmed by everything. The redness of the blood, the purity of the dog's gaze. He tucked his knives away, into his father's old tatty backpack, and went to the door. The dog was young, still gangly and out of proportion, but Will could see every last one of her ribs, the hard line of her spine, the sharp points of her hips. He reached out a tentative hand and when she didn't snap, in fact leaning into his touch, he gathered her up and carried her to his car, setting her in the passenger seat. She wagged and panted at him.

Will remembered, when he was young, a veterinarian had come to his school for career day and had told them all about feeding animals right. This is how Will found himself at a pet supply store at 6 in the morning, buying dog food, a soft cloth collar, a leash, bowls, and, on impulse, a big fluffy dog's bed for the skinny dog now shut up in his yard on the other side of town. She was the first one, and he named her Sasha. When he brought her into the vet a few weeks later, he told the vet he'd adopted her a few weeks ago and she'd put on twenty pounds, the vet said it was a good thing, she was dangerously underweight even now. Will thought about Sasha pawing at an old drunk's door, hungry to the bone but still so sweet and loving, and he felt unspeakably lucky that he'd picked the right man in the right house.
A few days later Will was waiting in the police department until dispatch got its act together, when he overheard two detectives talking to another uniform. "Got a real bloody one," said the one, "looks like he got hisself on the wrong side of a wolf."

Will smiled into his cheap coffee.

-x-

Will thought about that night, and about old Sasha back home. The old girl probably didn't have much time left but she'd lived a very long time for a dog her size. Beneath him, a young man with a penchant for beating cats was thrashing wildly, Will considered him and could resist the urge to clamp his jaws around the man's throat. It was going to be a pain to cut out his teeth marks and saliva later, but now the hot splash and the young man's stillness were worth it.

-x-

Sitting across from Abel Gideon in the cells beneath the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, Will reflected that while the man wasn't entirely boring, he was too squeamish to be completely delicious. He certainly wasn't the Ripper and Will almost felt a little sorry for him when the Ripper caught up to him. Almost.

Will gives a perfectly bland and banal interview, all the while shuffling and reshuffling the circumstances, trying to find a way to kill Dr. "ah a teacher" Chilton without being a caught. Perhaps, if Gideon believed the psychic driving rhetoric, he could be the one kill Chilton.

Much as Will wanted the pleasure of seeing the man split like a bad burn, there was no way Jack wouldn't look straight at him.
Gideon remained amused, obtuse and unhelpful, however, and Will left the would-be Ripper to rot in his cell.

-x-

Someone has been leaving Jack messages on his answering machine, using the voice of Miriam Lass to skewer Jack with the lances of his old failures. It's a cerebral assault, Will thinks, not a biological one. It's the Ripper's favorite way to hurt, even more than forks or scalpels, and Will considers that in light of his new favorite obsession with the Ripper's physical reality.

Will wonders what it would be like to bring the Ripper totally into his body, if that's even possible, if the Ripper even can shut off his marvelous brain without the help of chemical enhancement. If the Ripper can let go with someone deep inside him, all saliva, body hair, sweat, and breathy gasps. The idea of drugging the doctor leaves a sour taste in his mouth, Will thinks that it probably wouldn't accomplish much either. Malice is easy for the Ripper to shrug off. Will doesn't want the man to have his fun and then leave to find his knives, Will wants the Ripper to come crawling. He doesn't want to be appealing bait, he wants to be irresistible. He wants the Ripper to realize that he wants something base, something common and ordinary and he wants to watch the Ripper lower himself to get it.

So Will convinces Jack to arrange a meeting with Freddie Lounds. He tells her to write an article pinning Gideon as the Chesapeake Ripper, telling Jack this will make the Ripper so enraged that he will make a mistake. Will knows perfectly well that the Ripper doesn't make mistakes, except for one particularly sensual one Will hopes, but he also knows Lecter cannot resist an invitation to perform.

What remains is the question of whether Miriam Lass is indeed speaking digitally from beyond her grave, or if Lecter has her squirreled away somewhere. Will is inclined to think the latter, but he can't fathom how the always-meticulous Ripper could leave such a glaring loose end. Someone would find her eventually, they always did, and if Lecter had her arm, her voice, how could she not immediately point him out? If he was counting on being able to kill her after they started looking but before they found her, Will would have to re-evaluate his impression of the Ripper's intelligence. Any killer that left his freedom to chance didn't want it much anyway.

-x-

At home, Will stirred the garlic and onions bubbling on his stove. Sasha sat on the tiles watching him. She yawned hugely, her ears folding backwards as her face flexed. Will chuckled, reaching one hand over to the clamped shut cookie jar that held the dog treats. “The others are still outside, so this is our secret, mm?” he told her, and flipped the dog treat towards her. In her younger days she would’ve jumped to catch it no matter where he through it, but with arthritis in her hips and hocks, Will aimed more carefully and she caught it with a snap of her jaws. Adding tomatoes and leaving his pasta sauce to simmer, Will sat on the floor with his back against the cabinets and Sasha limped over to him.

“Lecter’s covered his tracks somehow,” he told her, scratching behind her floppy ears, “somehow, Lass doesn’t know that he’s doing this to her.” Sasha lay down on the tile and plunked her head in his lap. “Yeah,” he said as if she’d replied, “what if somebody pointed that out to her.” He folded himself over and pressed a kiss to Sasha’s broad skull. “You have the best ideas, Sasha,” he told her.

“Now where would I hide a woman that I didn’t want dead if I was a broad shouldered golden skinned doctor with a serious god complex?”

Sasha drooled onto his jeans.

“Close,” Will agreed, “I’d need her on hand. I’d need to keep her fed and watered.”

Sasha licked the drool from her lips sleepily.

“But not too close. Too close and I’m the first place the cops look if some idiot stumbles onto her.”

Will stopped, staring vacantly at the kitchen counter across from them.

“Sasha, how is he moving around?”

Sasha’s ears perked up when she heard her name but she didn’t move her head.

“When he goes out on a kill, how does he get there? His house is on a high-traffic, well-lit, residential street. There’s bound to be nosy neighbors looking out their windows all the time. How does nobody see him coming and going at all hours of the morning? Maybe he could get away with those kind of hours as a surgeon, but psychiatrists don’t get the number of late night calls that surgeons do.”

Shifting Sasha off of his lap, Will padded to the living room and booted up his laptop and called up google maps. Lecter’s house had woods behind it, but Will remembered his garden being walled off. It wasn’t unfeasible that Lecter could jump the wall, but the neighbors would absolutely notice that.

“If he’s not going over,” Will called to Sasha who had sat up blearily in the kitchen but had not bothered to follow him, “he has to be going under.”

There were no digital copies of the sewer system below Baltimore online, but Will couldn’t imagine those would be very appealing, too likely to sink their smell into the Ripper’s expensive suits and into the access point below his house, whatever that was.

“Fuck,” he muttered resting his knuckles against his lips, “breaking into the Ripper’s house is just such a very bad idea.”

Sasha whuffed in the kitchen, now standing forlornly over her empty supper bowl. Will rose to his feet and moved to the back door, a flood of dogs immediately streaming through and into the kitchen. Allocating their food to their various bowls, Will returned to his tomato sauce. “No. No that’s too stupid, even for me. Somebody in local government has to have blueprints of all the crap under the ground.”

Will made himself a mental note, and resolved not to think much more about it until he had more information.

Chapter End Notes

My love for Will's dogs is infinite, can you tell?

I am absolutely diverging from canon with Will's dogs in favor of my own fan-cast. Sasha is a pit bull terrier in my head.

Caldwell

Chapter Summary

In which Will sticks his nose where it doesn't belong, Jack is insufferably boring, and Hannibal is inebriated.

Chapter Notes

So uh. I got really busy with school. I'm so sorry. Law school is hell and this fic is a kind of odd therapy which probably says terrible things about my health but gosh thank you so much for reading it. Every last one of your kudos and comments are loved and treasured, thank you so much. If you find the time to tell me what you think about this chapter, or your day, or whatever you want, I shall love it wholly.

Also! I have taken a number of liberties with Sorbet. I also have exactly two photos of Baltimore's city hall and have completely invented the records office, for which I apologize as I like pushing Will around the actual world as much as possible.
Thank you again.

The next day Jack Crawford calls him in a lather to tell him the Ripper has struck again. Will was almost pleased to find out what Lecter had been up to, but standing in the dark hotel room he feels nothing but pale disgust. He knows he isn't being very convincing as he explains this is not a Ripper kill, that this is a botched organ harvest by a heart-stoppingly guilty sweaty-handed amateur, but honestly he can't put the energy into explaining such a basic chain of logic. He wants to go home and sit with his dogs, or drive out of town and put his hands into somebody's warm guts. Jack Crawford's game is beginning to lose its amusing properties.

-x-

Dr. Lecter's breath smells of sweet fruity alcohol and he moves with uncharacteristic looseness as Will steps into his office. "You've been drinking," Will says stupidly. Honestly he cannot believe the Ripper would ever voluntarily let down his walls chemically or otherwise so completely in front of him. The Ripper tells him about his psychiatrist and Will feels the powerful need to meet them move through him like a bolt of lightning. Lecter tells

him that he is also going to have a glass of wine and Will wonders what would happen if he refused. It feels like a powerfully bad idea in his animal hind brain and Will accepts the fine crystal glass between his fingers with the insane urge to giggle.

Lecter tells him that he has an unconventional psychiatrist but that a glass of wine is perfectly conventional. Will wonders if Lecter actually sees himself as an unconventional therapist, that he is genuinely helping this version of Will Graham even if others would term those results evil etcetera etcetera. It is both utterly ludicrous and fits perfectly into the jigsaw construction Will is building of Lecter's pathology. He decides he needs to think further on Lecter's motivations and returns his attention to the conversation.

Will tells him about the kidney thief and, Will attributes this to the alcohol slowing Lecter's inhibitions, Lecter all but tells him that his next few kills will be a blatant attempt to blur the Ripper and the organ thief. Jack Crawford will jump for the bait and Will is going to have to sit there and tolerate it even though he will know, and Lecter is fully aware that he will know, that the two could not be further apart. Will glares balefully at the rosy wine in his glass and contemplates showing up drunk to Crawford's next summons.

-x-

Will couldn't say he'd ever really registered the existence of Baltimore's city hall before, it was a building that his eyes slid by on their way to look at something else. For all its magnificent architecture, the stately dome rising above the city on either side, Will had simple never paid attention to it before. Slipping through the massive courtyard outside had been difficult enough, the presence of so many other humans pressed on him like weights, but now he stood with his nose almost to the closed elevator doors, waiting, trying hard not to see the reflections of those behind him. The records office was guarded by a very short, very stern woman seated at a desk behind which will could see a doorway leading to the unfathomable depths beyond.

Will slipped into one of his old reliable masks, produced from the dusty reaches of his mind. It was one of his first, and laughably simple compared to the one he wore for Lecter. An earnest student all but tiptoed up to the woman, hunch backed from his studies and eyes bright with delusional fervor. Will murmured to her about his thesis in architectural philosophy of pre-modernist America. She snapped back about wearing gloves, putting things back, dog-earing pages leading to jail time. Will nodded, eyes huge and appeasing.

Moments later he stood in the fluorescent gloom, peering at the index card the tiny woman had handed him. Feeling a bit like Theseus, and smiling because he knew Lecter would picture himself the minotaur, Will wove through the towering metal bookcases to a row of short metal cubes with wide, short drawers. It took most of the day to find the blue prints for

the steam tunnels. “Oh you naughty boy,” Will murmured into the gloom, and there beneath the pad of his index finger was a long straight tunnel right below Dr. Hannibal Lecter’s house.

“I’m sorry?” came an answering voice from the gloom. Will’s head snapped up, his face terrifyingly honest without its mask. The man stepped back in surprise. Will quickly flicked his eyes down, assembling his face again from whatever remnants were at the front of his mind. “You startled me!” he said, his mouth is a charming, crooked grin. His eyes are blue and boyish. His hands have just avoided clawing holes into the blueprint below them. The man quickly smiles again. He is an actual student, Will thinks with some amusement. He and the student are flirting, Will’s haphazard mask moving its mouth and fluttering its eyelashes. Will wonders when he can find the time to kill him. If it would be useful to keep the student around. What the Ripper would say if his new pet were found on a date with a PhD candidate as harmless as a tissue. Will gets the student’s phone number, replaces the blueprints oh so accidentally out of order so it will be difficult to find what he was looking at, and slides from the records office as silent as smoke.

-x-

Will knows this is a gamble. Lecter is going to be furious that he missed his appointment, but this is the only time Will can be certain Lecter will not be home. He is standing in a small municipal park, there is a manhole cover under the toes of his boots. Will wonders if the Ripper himself has ever used this particular entrance. If he climbed inside with flesh over his shoulder and slipped down the ladder all muscles and threat. Will wonders what would happen if the Ripper found him here one evening. Waiting with knives, with Jack Crawford, with bloody knuckles.

The darkness swallows him as he slips his feet onto the faintly damp runs of the ladder in the ground. The manhole cover he drags back over his head, and presses his forehead to the ladder as he waits for the darkness to open up around him. The only light is a distant emergency light. It’s powered efficiently by discrete solar panels on the surface, Will can see the blueprint in his mind and trace the path of the electrical wiring behind his eyes. He has a pair of goggles in his jacket with red lenses to preserve his night vision when he reaches the lights. His knives are snug against the hollow of his back, embracing him with sweet surety.

Will’s footsteps are worryingly loud as he creeps along the tunnel, the round walls made crimson through the glass over his eyes. He feels as if he is in the Ripper’s veins, if he were to take his knives and drive them into the wall he would be soaked in the Ripper’s black heart’s blood. The knives are tight to his back, their presence keeps him from wandering too far into the daydream.

Lecter's house is well hidden, even down here where nobody who would be missed had any business being, Will would not see the slender alcove if he weren't following an internal map. He has to push himself sideway to slide through it, and walk nearly ten feet in absolute darkness to the door which is itself painted to be a wall, the latch concealed in the frame to the side. Will takes an embarrassingly long time to find it, and it feels strangely intimate when he does claw his fingers below the metal lever and force it up. The door is heavy, but utterly silent, and Will slides into a poured cement basement.

No fewer than three upright deep freezers stand against the far wall. A band saw dominates the adjacent wall, the wall with the door set into it that Will has just passed through. Against the wall to his right is a long work bench festooned with other power tools and bits of hardware, the raw materials of a Ripper tableau. Will can't resist removing his left glove and sliding his fingers along the blade of the band saw and pulling them back to watch the scarlet blooms sprout from his flesh. He wonders if immaculate Dr. Lecter will notice the drops on the metal when next he comes down here. Drawing the gloves back on and feeling the burn of the cuts where they drag against the soft interior, Will creeps to the freezers and peers inside one of them. A pair of arms hold themselves in a vacuum sealed plastic back. A long strip of flesh that is almost certainly the loin meat of the woman Jack found last week rests on the shelf below. A pair of kidneys floats in oil, no Will realizes belatedly, marinates in oil. Will slides the freezer door shut. An operating table occupies the middle of the room with a ring of drains around it. This Will ignores in favor of passing through the doorway on the fourth wall to access a very steep, very narrow staircase beyond. Climbing it, he has to go on all fours. The uppermost access is a trapdoor and Will presses it open ever so delicately, eyes moving for triggers sensors and wires. The Ripper is too confident to employ such measures, but he looks all the same.

He finds himself in Hannibal's pantry. The smell of cereal grains and dried spice fills his nose. He climbs all the way out without opening the pantry door, and shuts the trap door, seeing it melt into the floor seamlessly. Even knowing exactly where it is, Will's eyes cannot find the edges. He wonders if the Ripper constructed it with himself, and amuses himself with the image of Dr. Lecter the Carpenter, or if some very unfortunate contractor handled the basement on his behalf. Will glances at his watch. He is on time, but has to move quickly.

-x-

Putting himself to sleep has never been especially easy on him, but thankfully he manages it in his cavernous classroom not five minutes before the Ripper wakes him up again. "I have a twenty-four hour cancelation policy," he tells Will. His mask is immaculate, the smile genial and the voice warm and endearing. With a start, Will realizes the friendly relief is real and the Ripper is pleased to find him asleep. Was he pleased Will didn't stand him up on purpose, Will wondered, or was it something else.

“I must’ve fallen asleep,” he mumbles thickly, scrubbing his eyes with the heels of his hands, and then belatedly with all the social gracelessness of this particular version of himself, adds a grunted “sorry”. Lecter smiles beatifically, and turns his attention to the photographs Will has scattered beneath his elbows. Regular as clockwork, the Ripper peers out of Lecter’s eyes, his ego pushing at Will for his perfect, flattering clarity of vision. Will pictures Lecter’s basement and holds the sweet savor of that secret in the roof of his mouth as he describes the Ripper’s pathology, moving his tongue over the dark contours with forced consideration. He thinks about how the Ripper’s tongue tastes and stares into Lecter’s dark eyes. He thinks about biting off that forked tongue and drinking down that hot, thick blood like the red wine Lecter favors. Will’s phone buzzes against his leg.

Crawford. Now, Will contemplates just opening up his aorta and letting Lecter play if it means he will not have to stare at another botched surgery painted up as a Ripper kill. He settles for dragging Lecter along with him, determined not to suffer Crawford’s idiocy alone.

-x-

Crawford and Katz are in full police mode, all self-righteousness and long powerful strides. Lecter peers around the ambulance bay with great interest, committing the details to memory. Will is deeply and unaccountably amused by this. The paramedic they’re trailing after is telling them about GPS trackers, which Will could’ve told them from working as a beat cop in New Orleans but nobody asked him and he’s feeling peevish, both on his own and the Ripper’s behalf. Lecter leans close and murmurs that this experience “is very educational”. Will wonders for the thousandth time why Crawford hasn’t caught the man who has all but mounted a neon sign over his head.

Caldwell is a pale, desperate man leaning over an open abdominal wound with blood to his wrists. Will can feel the indignation pouring off of Lecter, both at Caldwell’s poor technique and that he is being presumed upon to perform an occupation his has ostensibly abandoned. Even so, Will cannot stop himself from thinking that he looks magnificent. Hannibal Lecter wears the power over life and death like a cloak of blood soaked velvet. The Ripper turns to him and they lock eyes. The Ripper beseeches him to taste the heady drug of his power, and Will tries so hard not to reveal that he has, and has been its slave for years.

Budge

Chapter Summary

In which Will speculates, the Wolfman strikes, and Lecter enjoys the show.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alana and Will get lunch at a tiny bistro in Baltimore proper. Will hadn't seen her since she snuck him into see her friendly neurologist. They talk politely, or rather, Will's mask talks politely and Will himself considers the chessboard between himself and the Ripper. At some point, Alana produces a tiny notebook that Will is terrified not to remember at all. She flips it open and shows him an oval with numbers dripping out of its edge and sliding down like tears. "Do you remember drawing this?" she asks him. She is smiling as if she knows he wouldn't and for a split second Will wants to carve that barely patronizing expression off her face. "No," he answers instead, truthfully. He remembers her request, he remembers his hand moving but in a murky, underwater way. "Alana, thank you," he says through the mask.

"What did Hannibal say?" she asks and Will frantically ducks behind his mask, which prattles with comforting ease and the Chesapeake Ripper's gracious concern.

Will and Dr. Lecter have not resolved the encephalitis issue. It is suspended in time like a clock's pendulum that can't finish its swing. Both he and Lecter were hesitant to give that pendulum the requisite push lest it swing too fast or too wildly. Will knows the next move requires a delicate touch.

Thank God for Tobias Budge.

-x-

Will is standing in a concert hall fighting against everything he is because if even Jack notices the fraying at the edges he is in serious trouble. It's just that the kill is so exquisitely beautiful. Will could make snow angels in the drifts of its beauty. The man's jaw bone is as sharp and bright as a blade in the lights, the tendons of his neck are elegantly drawn lines that cast neat shadows on the biological apparatus beneath. Will can see through the killer's motives in a second, its nowhere near so complex as a Ripper display, but it is absolutely gorgeous. He wishes for a brief moment that Dr. Lecter were there.

Jack is staring at him.

“He was a trombone player for the orchestra,” Jack tells him in a voice that is all steel and keen edges, “with a wife. Children. Grandchildren.” Will smooths his face perfectly flat and then presses the expression of sorrow up from beneath. “I’m not him, Jack” he says softly, sounding wounded and delicate. He wants to scream and throw something heavy at Jack for forcing these banal emotions over the beauty on display. Instead, he hunches his shoulders and stares at his feet. Jack looks guilty, even as he snaps out a remark about getting to work. Will doesn’t know any lawyers but he suspects that a lawyer would be very interested in this exchange. A pity he didn’t record it.

Finally, everyone shuts up and Will can sink back into the dark if shallow waters of the killer before him. Music erupts in his mind, thrumming through him from spine to sternum. It is romantic, yearning and powerful. Will can feel stinging tears gather beneath his eyelids and can’t remember the last time that had happened. Whomever this is for is either in a lot of trouble or the killer believes them to be like minded.
It hits Will like a truck. The beauty, so reminiscent of the Ripper but distinct in its lack of complexity, is intentional. The serenade is specifically for the Chesapeake Ripper. His mind is rolling down a long hill without breaks, gathering momentum with each conclusion. The man had to know that this display was relevant to the Ripper. The man had to know the Ripper would approve of the aesthetics, which could come from simply reading TattleCrime, but a man who put this much care into one tableau would have to have considered his victim carefully. The victim was meant to appeal to the Ripper. The victim was a musician. Will would bet both of his knives Hannibal attended the symphony, of course he attended the symphony. The killer knew Dr. Hannibal Lecter and he knew that Dr. Hannibal Lecter was the Ripper.

Will had no more time to consider the state of their shared chess board, a third player had moved for both of them and Will did not like that at all. If Lecter knew who the killer was, Will needed to know and he needed to know now.

Will described his profile to Jack on autopilot and practically flew from the symphony hall, already dialing Lecter’s number on his ancient cell phone. Gosh it had been such a trying day; Will required an emergency appointment.

-x-

Lecter is aware that their game is back in motion. Will couldn’t say if Lecter has yet recognized the magnitude of the player he is playing against, but Lecter is certainly enjoying himself and paces around his desk like a shark circling discarded meat. Will watches the Ripper as he obliges him in their little play acting of hunter and hunted, so amused by the existence of the Ripper’s nostrils, his earlobes, his just-short-of-perfectly styled hair.

Lecter is speaking, telling Will about bone flutes, taking the first strike. Will doesn’t parry, instead simply moving out of the way and retaliation, describing the pinnacle of craftsmanship, savoring the slight dilation of the Ripper’s pupils as professional envy moves through him. “The corpse was positioned so exactly I could hear his song,” he says

enunciating carefully. “What kind of song was it, Will,” Lecter asks him, voice a liquid whisper. “A serenade,” Will replies. They are stopped on either side of the large, solid desk, watching each other.

Will’s mask is smarting, he doesn’t smell like fish and he’s making too much eye contact. For once, Will ignores it. The light of Lecter’s gaze is encroaching on Will’s protective shadows, but Will is transfixed. The Ripper stands before him, powerful and cunning. “Who is he serenading?” Lecter asks him, so softly Will strains to hear him. Will’s mask at last supersedes him, jerking him aside to avoid further eye contact and carrying them over to the dark window. Greedily, Will drinks in the watery reflection behind him. “The Chesapeake Ripper, I think,” he says slowly, speculatively.

Dr. Lecter does not take the bait. Instead of coming up on Will’s unprotected back, he sits in his therapy chair and withdraws one of his black notebooks. “I must tell you something,” he says, voice no longer soft and intimate but detached and professional, “that goes just to the edge of doctor-patient confidentiality.” Will turns to study him, hands in pockets.

And the Chesapeake Ripper tells him about Tobias Budge.

-x-

Will’s lockpicks smoothly seek out and raise each of the five tumblers in Tobias Budge’s deadbolt lock. Will is annoyed that it takes him so long, he is out of practice with his picks and with these tiny movements through the barrier of his gloves. Budge lives above his shop, so he almost certainly works below. Will locks the door behind him.

The door to Budge’s work room is more thoroughly locked, there is another five-pin lock but also the man has rigged up a wire which would trigger a camera if the door is opened too widely. Will works fast, holding the wire steady, cutting through the wire with his belt knife with much uncomfortable contortion of his elbow through the slivered door, and stepping noiselessly onto the first stair beyond.

Closing the door behind him, Will flicks on the flashlight in his hip pocket, and tucks the butt of it between his molars. His utility tool, carried with his picks in a pocket on his knife harness, only has flimsy little pliers, but they do the job of twisting the wire on the door back together and restoring its normal tension. Will is banking that Budge does not have the same careful habits that Lecter does, and he already knows they share an ego from the tableau on the stage. Who but a rampant narcissist would woo the Ripper, after all.

At the bottom of the stairs, as Will had suspected, is Budge’s workspace. Rows of “catgut” string are drying neatly on the wall, the tiny work bench is cordoned off with standing screens, bottles of lye and olive oil and other things Will can’t identify are lined up. A single lamp illuminates the space, and Will stands on his toes to loosen the bulb. Taking the bulb by the base, he smacks it hard against his other hand a few times until he can hear the filament

rattle. He replaces the useless bulb and then by flashlight looks around the remainder of the basement.

Standing where Budge would, Will finds a likely blind spot and slips back out of the makeshift room. An unused standing screen is tipped against the wall beyond Budge's space, and Will settles into the dark triangle formed by the screen the wall and the floor, and forces his breathing to silent slowness. He waits.

-x-

Sitting in the dark, Will is reminded about his little terrier Buster. Will had found the little terrier nearly half a year after Sasha had come home with him. Will was still a uniformed patrolman then, still living off five pound bags of dried beans and rice; working hard to make sure he didn't look like he wanted the long twelve hour solo shifts but working equally hard to make sure he inevitably ended up with them.

Everyone in Biloxi knew that old Mrs. Hickman at the end of county road five was a hoarder. Unlike the last man who Will had gone after rather impulsively, Will had cased her house last weekend. Standing below her windows, the sound of birds yelling and the smell of filth had been like a sledgehammer to the senses. Will was glad he had gone in uniform under the guise of executing a welfare check, had needed to have a rapport with her to keep himself off the suspect list, and so he couldn't kill her right then.

Will hadn't seen the little dog then, and was glad he hadn't because he would've killed the old lady for sure.

Will had timed Hickman's death to coincide with a visit from a representative of the local ASPCA. He had seen the complaint drift across another detective's desk like a message from an oracle. She would be dead, and the thirty-two parrots would be repossessed and given the medical care they desperately needed. He'd only found Buster by accident, wasting away to hips and ribs, nose bloody with the remains of a dead something in the midst of the lady's collection, just as he was getting ready to leave her cooling corpse where it lay. Will had gone to move one of the bird cages away from the electric stove because only God and the devil knew what kind of condition the fuses in the lady's prefab home were in, and had heard the dog's yelp when he had stumbled back onto collection of discarded food bags and National Geographic magazines. Will had shuffled through the magazines carefully, apologizing under his breath to whatever he had stepped on, heart in his throat at what he might find. Will couldn't stand the sight of injured dogs.

Old Mrs. Hickman lay with all of her ribs distributed throughout the room like snowfall, and Will met Buster.

-x-

Will smiled in the perfect darkness of the basement, thinking of his playful little terrier who had no idea he was easily the smallest of Will's pack.

Budge opened the door, Will heard the camera fire and was gratified when Budge did not even pause on his way down the stairs, his trick with the wire utterly unnoticed. Budge made his way to his work station with easy familiarity, and Will heard the lamp switch click as he slid silently from his hiding place. He heard Budge's muttered curse, heard the lightbulb squeal in its socket as Budge tried to work it more tightly into its moorings.

Will's gloved hand sealed itself over Tobias Budge's nose and mouth. The man startled, but he didn't have the reflexes that Will did, that Will imagined Lecter must have. A trained hand-to-hand fighter would drive his elbow back into his assailant's solar plexus, but Budge just twisted in Will's arms. Will could feel his arm reach out, grasping for some unseen weapon on the workbench. Will's knee came out, his pelvis twisted, and Budge tripped neatly over his leg. Will followed him down, laying flat over his victim, all his weight going to immobilizing Budge's knee and hip joints, removing any lifting power. At last, Budge went still under him. Will removed his hand immediately, flipping Budge onto his back and lowering his cheek to Budge's nose and mouth until he felt a thread breath.

Just as Will intended, the erstwhile musician was unconscious but not dead. Will had to move fast. Will's knife was out of its sheath and in his hand, Will's flashlight was back in his mouth where it would blind Budge if he woke too soon and provide Will some light to work by in the meantime.

Will didn't have the Ripper's surgical expertise but he flattered himself with his high level of dexterity. Budge's right cheek flopped wetly into his hand with three neat cuts. Will removed the other cheek just as fast, then removed the sterile bandage from his jacket pocket, and quickly sealed them over the wound. The man would not bleed out before he got to a hospital, would hopefully not qualify for immediate skin grafts, and would certainly be much more distinctive afterwards.

Will exited the tiny music shop, slashing the camera wire with his belt knife and not bothering to reattach it as he left.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for your comments and kudos, I doubt any author can adequately express the depths to which each one is appreciated. I'm splitting Fromage into two parts because it's a very busy episode indeed.

Wells

Chapter Summary

In which blood spills.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will was sleeping soundly when there was knock at his front door. His only class that day was late in the afternoon, and though the caller had technically arrived during excusable hours, Will felt peeved to be awakened so prematurely.

It was Alana Bloom, cheeks prettily pinked by the cold wind from the marsh. Will's dogs barked their greetings to her and pressed their faces up against the screen door. "Hi," Alana said as he stepped back to allow her inside, "I wanted to check up on you." She is smiling pleasantly, though thankfully not flirtatiously. This is why Will responds the way he does. His mask smiles warmly, he says that he very much appreciates the gesture, then he takes her hands in his, and kisses her with romance novel tenderness.

Predictably, she steps back. Will could headbutt her, and have his hands wrapped around her trachea in the span of a second. He allows himself to look hurt, instead. She tells him softly, with enraging sensitivity that she can't be in a relationship with him. That they wouldn't work. He tells her that he's fine and asks her to leave.

Will figures she'll avoid him out of, if nothing else, embarrassment for a least a week. Maybe two, if he's lucky.

-x-

Will teaches his classes, he plays with his dogs, he goes fishing and restores his piscine stink. He manages to do this for nearly three days until he cannot bear the waiting any more, and finds himself driving to Baltimore. He hopes he will see more of Hannibal Lecter's house if he can't find a productive move to make on their shared chessboard. It's dinner time, and he remembers too belatedly that Lecter prides himself on his cooking. What he doesn't expect, when Lecter allows him inside, is the second plate setting or the lavishly appropriated dining room.

Will freezes in the doorway. When Lecter asks, his mask makes nervous apologies about interrupting his dinner. Yet again Will's mind is moving uncomfortably, uncontrollably

quickly. Who was Lecter eating with, why didn't Lecter want them to meet, and why is the dining room so ornately arranged? Even without the place settings, the room would have a shrine like quality. Before he can allow the cascade of logic to come to a natural rest, Lecter shepherds him into the kitchen and Will lets the fact that Hannibal Lecter has Leda and the Swan in his dining room catch up with him. He is not sure he can stop himself from howling with laughter, but Lecter's expectant expression draws him up short.

"I kissed Alana," he blurts out before he can stop himself. This, he thinks to himself, this is the best you can come up with? Dr. Lecter stares at him with an expression like black ice, for a moment Will is terrified his mask has fallen away and he has spoken aloud. Lecter hands him a plate of dessert with eyes like clotting blood. Will feels cold fear at the base of his skull.

"What did Alana do," Lecter asks him, and his voice is pitch black. Will's mask is mournful, Will is a bit mournful himself, never has he missed his knives so much as he does in this moment, although he's not even sure he could win a fight with the Ripper with all of his toys at hand. Distantly, he hears himself tell the Ripper about being rejected. Lecter relaxes the smallest amount, a creaking fissure appearing in his glacial façade. So, Will thinks, the Ripper is feeling a little bit possessive. The question was, whether he felt possessive of the beautiful Dr. Bloom, or of Will. The man did so like having his pawns at hand.

Lecter is expressing platitudes and Will returns his focus to the dining room like a man in the desert turns to an oasis. Leda and the Swan in such a context could be considered a surprisingly crass joke about eating humans. In a flash Will remembers the "protein scramble" he had been offered after the death of Cassie Boyle and her display in the empty field. He think about the kidneys in oil below their feet, or in the stomach of Lecter's dinner guest, and how he had thought the word marinating when he'd seen them.

Well, well, Will thought, no wonder you forced Hobbes' hand. Can't have more than one cannibal in Baltimore. Will is suddenly desperate for an invitation to one of Lecter's dinner parties, and curses himself for making this mask a man without social graces or temptation.

"A terrible thing," Lecter murmurs, and Will can't stop himself from thinking about the Chesapeake Ripper in a dentist's chair, drooling onto a napkin that is clipped to his obnoxiously colored shirt, "my dinner guest had been attacked, and in his own home."

Suddenly Will is sitting at the chessboard again. "Baltimore seems to attract terrible people," he agrees soberly. "He seemed to think it was the Chesapeake Ripper who had done it," says Doctor Lecter, gracefully appropriating Will's empty dish and tipping it together with his own into the sink. "If it had been the Ripper," Will answers with this persona's taciturn bluntness, "he wouldn't have survived."

"Maybe he made an exception for this victim," Lecter speculates with faux-thoughfulness, leaning hard on his wrists. "Has Jack heard about your friend?" Will asks him, locking eyes with Lecter.
"No. He didn't even go to a hospital, he has a terrible fear of civil authority."

Lecter's voice is grave so it's not really appropriate that Will doesn't manage to hold back all of his snorting laugh. Lecter raises one pale eyebrow politely. "Then he can be certain it

wasn't the Ripper, if the Ripper left somebody alive they wouldn't have a choice about a hospital visit," Will says this with certainty, both of his selves feeling absolutely sure in that conclusion. From the barest little twinkle in Lecter's eyes, he agrees.

"Have you sent anyone to investigate Tobias Budge?" Lecter asks him politely, as if they hadn't just been talking about the same man. "Jack says it's on the list," Will replies with the bored frustration of a peon in a corrupt workplace, "says he's got some other leads too so I don't know if he's gotten around to it yet."

"Are you still hearing the killer's serenade?" Lecter asks him. Will stares at the other man who has gone from polite and pastel to bloody intensity in a blink of his eyes. "It's our song," Will answers before his mask can speak. Hannibal watches him for a long while before they make their small talk and goodbyes and Will drives back to Wolf Trap. His head feels full of tangled up yarn.

-x-

Crawford calls him the next day. The musical killer had struck again, a man named Franklyn Froidveaux had been found in his home, skinned and beheaded. The skin had been stretched hastily over a drum frame. The head had been found left in front of the bathroom mirror propped up on a block of cheese and smeared with makeup. Apparently he had reported Budge as the musical killer, and had been placed in protective custody, and two cops were also dead with their throats cut.

Will is glad Budge wasn't long for this world, he would've only gotten more boring over time, Will is sure. He wonders if Hannibal was amused by this flimsy pantomime or irritated by its clumsiness.
Will tells Jack he'll drive to the Froidveaux house, and instead drives straight to Lecter's office. He's wearing his gloves, his sidearm, and his belt knife, but his killing knives are still securely in the false closet in Wolf Trap.

Will doesn't even bother knocking as he opens the door to Lecter's office. Budge is bleeding from somewhere on his arm, his pale shirt is marred by a cloud of scarlet, but he has managed to lock up Lecter's arm with one of his own twisted around the elbow joint. A roll of piano wire is straining towards Lecter's throat with the help of Budge's other hand. Will wonders if Budge is actually under the delusion that he is winning.

Lecter sees him draw his gun out of the corner of his eyes, and immediately brings up a foot to kick the side of Budge's knee, taking the musician's legs out from under him. Lecter ducks his head as Budge goes down and is suddenly utterly removed from what had seemed like such a complete hold. Just as Will thought, Lecter had been instructing Budge in the error of his ego. Or perhaps, he thought with acid humor, had just never been taught not to play with his food.

His aim, as it always is, is exact.

Budge has fallen with his back to Will, and a red spot appears at the base of his skull. He dies instantly, and Will flips the safety back on his gun.

The Ripper is watching him with absolute inhuman stillness. “Are you alright?” Will asks him with feigned distress. His mask makes his knees shake as he picks his way across the office, peering down at Budge. With one foot, Will kick’s the man’s uppermost shoulder down so he lies supine on the floor. Two wicked pink snarls consume the flesh on either side of his face.

“Yes,” Lecter gasps, putting pressure on whatever wound Budge has left in his thigh with more pain in his voice than he feels, which makes Will rolls his eyes with his back to the doctor, “thanks to you.”

Will looks at Budge for a second longer then lifts his head, sheathes the gun, and moves to where Lecter had sat heavily in his desk chair. The Ripper’s hand rests casually on the edge of his desk, Will wonders what he has slipped into the long middle drawer. “Tobias Budge, I presume,” Will nods to the corpse in the room, his voice is perfectly neutral as if Lecter hadn’t revealed last night that he’d had dinner with a wanted serial killer.

Lecter nods, licking his lips. He doesn’t wear vulnerable well, Will thinks, but that suited his stoic character. Will could have his gun out again. He could end the reign of the Chesapeake Ripper here and now. He stares into the Ripper’s eyes, as always fascinated by the depth and totality of the darkness beyond. The world would be so much more boring without this man.

“I need to call Jack,” Will whispers. He’s standing too close. Lecter could take out whatever he’d slipped into the desk and have Will’s neck open, pass it off as Budge’s work, and claim checkmate. Lecter’s knees part ever so slightly, allowing Will to stand a little closer.

“Yes, you do,” Lecter agrees.

They stare at each other as Will produces his cell phone, hits speed dial. Jack’s voice might as well be white noise for all the attention either of them afford it.

-x-

Jack is playing name that corpse with the pieces of a disassembled totem pole when Lecter pays a visit to Wolf Trap. It doesn’t look any less absurd this time around. Sasha has managed to limp her way out to the front porch and is leaning heavily against a support pillar as Hannibal scratches obligingly behind her ear. Buster is wagging so hard the vibration travels all the way up his body, but he is watching politely through the bars of the railing instead of mobbing the visitor, as he’s been taught. Will slips him a treat for his good behavior. The other dogs are minding their manners, so of course then everyone needs treats.

Lecter uses Will’s pleased silence to invite him to visit Abigail’s facility, and waits patiently with Sasha as Will gets himself together. He is in a good mood and allows himself to dress

very slightly out of character: his shirt follows the line of his torso, his trousers show the shape of his thighs. Not so well as to suggest expensive tailoring, more that he had been lucky at a department store. Still the Chesapeake Ripper's eyes follow the shift of his hips when he locks his front door and Will takes the cheap victory for maybe more than it's worth.

-x-

Will's good mood is utterly gone as soon as Abigail Hobbs opens her mouth.

"Freddie Lounds and I are going to write a book," she tells them with a careful expression Will interprets to mean she knows they aren't going to be pleased. Hannibal has gone very still beside him, Will would swear the temperature in the room has dropped.

Abigail plunges on, "I need people to know what it was really like. I didn't do anything wrong!" She's overplayed her hand, and as if a light has come on Will can clearly see that she is lying. He thinks that in a court of law she would likely have a decent argument that she had felt she had no choice but to obey her father, and a jury would probably be sympathetic, but what she's trying to say is that she wasn't involved with the murders of the Minnesota Shrike. Will knows now that just isn't true.

Lecter is talking about how Abigail is risking her privacy along with his and Will's. Which is why he's so angry, Will thinks, because Lecter is as angry as Will has ever seen him though a camera would only show a well-appointed middle-aged man with very correct posture.

His mask makes a feeble attempt at paternal concern. Lecter had counted on him feeling obligated naturally and Will doesn't have a parental bone in his body so even his feint isn't very convincing. Will feels more sullen and irritable with every tick of the clock. Will has stopped paying attention to what his mask is doing entirely, and his sits in his inner darkness, brooding, until he and Dr. Lecter leave the building.

-x-

The body of Nicholas Boyle lays like so much grey ice on the metal slab of the FBI BSU lab. Will looks down at the body and wonders where Dr. Lecter was keeping it. Somewhere outside, certainly, but beyond that was a question for Katz and her henchmen.

Jack is in a rage. He forbids Will from counseling Abigail, sure he will be overly emotional because Lecter has been working so hard to make him look like a father figure. That suits Will down to the ground.
And then, for once in his life, Jack says something interesting. Jack says "I want to know where she goes when she climbs the walls of that facility".

Well, thought Will, he and his knives had an appointment to keep. And then Uncle Jack won't need to worry any more.

-x-

Will knows it's risky to be making his play so soon after expressing his disapproval of Abigail's future plans when he doesn't have even the shadow of an alibi. But Jack is convinced he feels paternal, Lecter certainly can't say anything, and Jack hasn't put the Copycat Killer together with the Ripper so he feels it's a decent gamble.

Will knives are against his back, the moon is waning, and the air is crisp and cold. Above him, the stars are out in force, watching eagerly through the needles of the pine trees that surround Abigail's mental health facility. If Will had to pick a smell he liked best after freshly spilled blood, it would be pine sap.

He strolls around the walls of the facility in the common knock off boots that are too big for him. He had weighted them down so forensics will figure Abigail's killer for a bigger man than Will when they find his tracks. Will feels at peace, breathing in the smell, enjoying the focus demanded in keeping oneself absolutely silent. He is pacing the length of the wall he guesses Abigail is most likely to use. He hopes that she will see him well enough to recognize him before she dies.

It is just after one in the morning when Abigail hauls herself over the concrete wall, levering her body up after her elbows are braced on the top of the wall. She rolls herself over the wall, and lowers her body to its full length before letting go, dropping with a quiet thud into the snow. Will is maybe twenty yards from her and feels no hurry as he ambles in her direction. Abigail pulls out a cell phone and peers into a blue glow, thumbs moving across the screen as she replies to a text.

Will is annoyed that she's ruined her night vision and doesn't have enough of Lecter's sense of smell to recognize Will by that alone. He clears his throat and says her name. If there's any kind of recording equipment, he's well and truly fucked. But she figured him for a useless, nervous freak and he intends to rectify that perception even if only for a moment.

Abigail's head comes up like a deer that has realized she is in the crosshairs. Will comes upon her with the inevitability of a tidal wave. He is past the guard of her arms before she can raise them, his gloved hand catches her long hair and hauls her head back, his knife finds the scar on her neck and finishes what her father began. As she lies bleeding on the ground, Will is overtaken by the beauty of the moment. He thinks how horribly inadequate it will be in the daylight, and his other knife slides out of its sheath. When they find Abigail, she will not be immediately recognizable as human.

Chapter End Notes

Do you ever feel as if you are out of control of what your characters are doing? I love that feeling.

And I love each and every one of you reading this. Thank you so much for reading this thing. If you have time to lead a kudo or a comment, I would love that too.

Madchen

Chapter Summary

In which things get a little worse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will Graham is going to be promoted to detective in the New Orleans detective force. Nobody else on the force could care less about Will Graham or his promotion, but it's an excuse to drink and that is something Louisianans take very seriously.

Will drives to the house of the officer throwing the party, feeling obligated to put in an appearance and well interested in free food that he won't have to cook at the best of times. Will slows as he passes the officer's neighbor. The house is big, lavishly decorated, but in front of the house is a white fenced pasture with two black horses in it. The horses have wounds that Will can see from the street. White patches of fur at the withers, missing hair at the chest and lower legs. Will stops the car, fishes out his tattered notebook, and scrawls the address with the chewed up pen that lives in his car's central console. Will goes to the party, and has a mediocre time.

Will lets a month go by before he goes to visit the people with the horses. Will creeps around the house and finds their barn, and the reason those horses look the way they do. It's a old, ramshackle structure. Their tack is antiquated and Will would bet they bought it for the appearance, not for its fit on the horses. The stalls aren't clean, the walls in poor repair, and Will can't see a single flake of hay anywhere.

He has chosen a target very well this evening, he thinks.

The locks on the doors of the house are expensive and complex, but the family has precociously left a window facing away from the road open, so Will elects not to bother with the locks and hoists himself over the windowsill. He is making his way to the wide stairway to the second floor when he hears a dog whimper. Will goes absolutely still, waiting, and after a moment the dog whimpers again and he follows the sound through a narrow door under the stairs.

The basement is poured cement, and the bulk of the facing wall is taken up with trophies, ribbons and photos. As Will makes his way closer to them, he sees that every one of them is for dog racing. The dog whimpers again and Will turns around to find a wire kennel with a white and black sighthound shivering at its bottom. Will crouches to get a better look at it, it's coat has been entirely shaved off but it has the build of a borzoi, or a saluki. Will pokes his fingers through the wire door and the dog whuffs at them and licks at them curiously. There

is no water in the cage, and the dog's tongue is worryingly dry. Will smiles at the dog, and stands again, walking upstairs with new purpose.

Later, when the husband and wife are lying bloody in their bed with their hearts at their feet, Will makes his way back downstairs and opens the door for the dog. She has a leather collar labeled "Ash", and Will wonders what color she'll be when her coat grows back. He leaves the cage door open, the door open, and drives Ash to the nearest gas station where he buys a gallon jug of water and works his belt knife through it until the top is cut off and Ash can drink from the make-shift bowl with great, greedy gulps.

Sasha and Buster take well to her, and Will is all smiles when he goes to his promotion ceremony the next day.

-x-

Standing in a cold farmhouse in Delaware, Will feels inspired. The corpse wears a Glasgow smile beautifully and only died because she was kept on her back where the blood could choke her. Will thinks he'll have to remember the method for later.

He's glad he'd made Jack allow him onto the case, Jack had almost made him stay home out of his conviction that grieving for Abigail would drive Will to distraction on a case. Will had to trot out the old reliable "I need to stay busy" before Jack finally acceded and drove him out to Delaware. Beverly Katz tells him she admires his dedication after such a great loss, and Will thinks she ought to admire his self-restraint for dragging his fingers through the cold clotted blood on the floor. It's nearly dry, but Will thinks he could get a little finger painting in yet.

Kneeling by the corpse of Beth LeBeau, Will tells Jack about the killer's conviction, the depth of her affection for the victim, and, as his empathy takes over, he tells Jack that the killer was just helping the victim take off a mask. He is abruptly intensely moved by the killer. He is a man who lives and dies by his masks, he wonders how it would be to have someone who loved him so deeply as to cut them from his skin so they could see him as he is. He wonders if Hannibal Lecter would like the beast that curls below his mask. If he weren't the vulnerable, principled lecturer he sent into therapy, would Lecter still invest time in him? He hoped their moment as Budge went cold on the floor of Hannibal's office meant that he would. Will has never hoped for a person before and he's not sure he likes the feeling.

Will goes back to Baltimore impatient to see the good doctor. Yet again he considers how he ought to go about procuring a seat at the man's dinner table.

-x-

This is not how Will imagined his next meeting with Lecter would go.

Will had hoped they would be building on what had happened after he'd killed Budge, adding Abigail on like putting a new log on the fire.

Instead he and Dr. Lecter sat opposite each other in an oppressive silence. The Chesapeake Ripper watched him balefully, with his mouth tight and hands folding. Gazing into his eyes,

Will was consumed by an absolute darkness that made his insides go cold.

“No friends or family attended her funeral,” Lecter said and his stare was unwavering, “the only people there were FBI agents and healthcare providers.” Will swallowed heavily. Lecter’s tone was as mild as summer’s day, not wavering or changing pitch either up or down. Will is motionless, as pinned as a butterfly under glass.

He hadn’t considered that the Ripper might have such a depth of emotion. A gaping hole yawns from his profile of the Ripper, and he can’t figure out how he missed it. The family trauma, as his blood freezes in its veins, he hadn’t gotten the family trauma right. It wasn’t the parents, it was somebody else. A sister or a close cousin, either someone the same age of Abigail had been or one who had simply been younger than Hannibal. Will doesn’t know how he’s going to patch this hole. When blood freezes, it crystallizes and develops spikes which destroy the integrity of blood vessels. Even if Will thaws, he will be dead instantly. Feeling l’appelle du vide, Will opens his mouth to ask who Hannibal lost. His jaw clicks shut a moment later, the silence between them undisturbed. “What good is a man without principles?” the Chesapeake Ripper asks him. Will clenches his molars, his mask is crumbling before his eyes and Lecter’s remains immaculate.

Finally he clears his throat and answers: “what good is a society that can’t accept different principles?” Lecter raises his pale eyebrows. “Are we to accept rapists, domestic violence” here Lecter paused for effect, “…animal abusers?” But for all his icy words, Lecter’s placid calm is disturbed and he is looking at Will with some of his old warmth.

“The salem witch trials,” Will tries slowly his tongue heavy with nerves, “killed innocent people because they were a convenient stand in for a monster that could not be caught.” Hannibal’s brow furrows. The Chesapeake Ripper has strode gracefully into middle-age and the folds on either side of his nose, on the outside of his eyes, are darkened by the ghost of smiles past. “Those people should not have died, then,” Hannibal asks him, “you think the monster should have died instead?” The implication heavy beneath his tone drives Will to his feet. He paces around the office as he replies, “no the fault isn’t with the monster, it’s with the witch hunters,” he says and although the words are confident, his voice is high and shaky. He comes to a rest by the sturdy wooden ladder leading to the balcony. He leans back against it, looking through shuttered lashes at Hannibal across the room. The Ripper watches him with interest. “The witch hunters just couldn’t let the monster alone,” Will murmurs.

Hannibal rises to his feet then, drawing up to the edge of Will’s personal space and then passing through it. He braces his arms on either side of Will, caging him between the Ripper and the ladder. “He who hunts monsters,” Hannibal rumbles, his accent is thick at this low volume, “must be cautious that he, too, does not become a monster.” He is so close Will can feel his breath against his lips, his eyes feel physically pinned open and focused by Hannibal’s bloody stare. “Have you become a monster, Will?” Will’s eyes drop to the ruddy mouth, then flicker back to meet Hannibal’s gaze again.

“That’s not my kind of crazy, doctor”.

Hannibal smiles, graciously, and draws back allowing Will to edge sideways, his chest behind its rumpled flannel forced against Hannibal’s immaculate dress shirt, and Will flees the office without a backwards glance.

When he gets home, he masturbates furiously, teeth savaging his lower lip when he comes and he swallows around his own blood where he lays panting in the bed.

-x-

Night falls and Will feels restless, afraid. He is not confident that he has assuaged Lecter's blood lust for the man who killed his surrogate daughter. The dogs care nothing for his restlessness and lay in warm, snoring piles in the living room. Will grabs his keys, not really sure what he's doing, and leaves the house.

He finds himself maybe an hour before dawn back in Delaware. His eyes are red with exhaustion. He wavers in the dark crime scene, staring restlessly at the old familiar clues, noticing nothing he hadn't before. The sound of his boots on the old wooden stair reverberates in his ears. Standing in the bedroom, now scrubbed clean of the blood that had sprayed over the floor, Will sinks into himself.

He thinks about slipping into the house. His feet are cold but he either doesn't or can't notice that, he creeps over the roof and drops through it. He waits in the dark until the woman pads upstairs, no more noticeable than a shadow on the wall, and then he-

Will stops.

He goes utterly still and then he hears it more clearly: the sound of a shuddering exhale.

Will goes to the door and shuts it, he is not wearing his knives tonight he had left in such a melancholy mood he hadn't thought he would need them. Without the harness Will doesn't have his picks, his belt knife; he feels abruptly naked. He tips himself forward, falling with a heavy thud to his forearms and knees. The girl under the bed stares balefully at him. She is obviously sick: murky eyes, yellow skin, brittle hair.

"Hello," Will says gruffly.

The girl erupts from beneath the bed like a bullet firing from a gun. Will curls up into himself, but she hits him from the side, tipping him onto his back and wrapping her hands around his neck. Will raises his fists over his head, bringing his forearms to block his face, and drives his elbows down to his chest, her grip around his neck is broken and her arms are trapped between his arms and chest.

She snarls at him and wiggles her arms savagely, but she just can't match Will for upper arm strength. Will wraps his legs around her hips and rolls them. Now he rests an arm across her throat, resting the full weight of his upper body on her trachea. She manages to get an arm free but Will uses his free hand to grab it and push it down to the floor. She twists and he feels something tear and come free in his hand. The blood lust is upon him now and he grins at her with sharp teeth.

The girl goes still beneath him, then rests a bare foot on his hip, and pushes, shoving herself out from under his chest, bringing his gaze level with her stomach instead of her face. He tries to draw back, but she grabs his arms at the wrists, and then kicks him right at the hinge of his jaw.

-x-

Will comes to in a hospital.

He can feel the tubing in his elbow, but his legs aren't in a massager so he wasn't sedated or put through surgery. The room has been kept dark with curtains and low lights, and the light coming in from the hallway is sickly fluorescent, but might as well be a laser for the lance of pain that shoot through Will's eyes when he looks at it. He groans, and rocks his head back to the dark room.

"Oh, good, you're awake."

The broad shouldered form in the dark shocks Will to full wakefulness. He head throbs in protest, but his heart in is his throat and he can feel his pulse in his wrists and temples suddenly fast and heavy. "Now do you mind telling me what the hell you were thinking?" The bedside lamp clicks on and the shadow resolves itself not into Hannibal, but Jack Crawford. Will sucks in great gulps of air as he realizes the Chesapeake Ripper is not, in fact, about to kill him. He does not think about the miniscule pang of disappointment beneath the overpowering relief.

"I wanted to see the crime scene again," Will mutters. He coughs, choking on his own dry throat. Jack holds out a Styrofoam cup and Will grimaces when he sees it contains not water, but chips of ice. Still, it's something and he pulls one between his molars and crushes it to nothing. "By yourself?" Crawford asks sharply, "at four in the fucking morning?"

"Thought I remembered something," Will says more to the bottom of the cup than to Jack.

"Did you?" Jack asks, clearly right on the edge of a full blown tantrum, bristling with righteous impatience.

"No," Jack opens his mouth and Will hastens to cut him off, "but I met the killer. She's sick, Jack," his eyes flick to Jack's and see the big man has fallen silent to listen more attentively. "And I bet it turned up in childhood. Can't be common. Somebody would have noticed. I bet Dr. Lecter could point us in the right direction." Jack heaves a heavy breath in and out. "You could've been killed that was-"

"Irresponsible. Irrational. I know. I'm sorry." Will is talking to the cup again, face angled away from the lamp as the adrenaline begins to wear off and his head starts to hurt again.

"Call him," Jack says smacking a cell phone into his hands, "who knows how far she got while you were laying there drooling."

-x-

Hannibal answers the phone on the second ring. "Hello, Agent Crawford," he says politely but his tone is stiff and cold. Will wonders if anyone but he would've noticed, could've gotten close enough to have the ability notice. "Actually," he says, "it's Will Graham. Hello Dr. Lecter."

“Will, to what do I owe this pleasure? No monsters at the door I trust,” Will knows that the man is in all likelihood plotting his murder and intending it to be quite painful and drawn out, but he can’t help but feel pleased that Lecter’s tone warmed considerably when addressing him. “I’m afraid it’s strictly business,” Will says apologetically, “I was hoping I could run a perp’s profile by you.” Jack shifts indignantly, “Jack isn’t particularly interested in giving you an option, actually,” he says with only the slightest spark of humor in the expression he gives Jack. Hannibal chuckles low and warm in his ear. “I am between patients. Please, Will, tell me your profile.”

Hannibal tells him about Cotard’s Syndrome. He tells him about psychotic depression, about the delusion of alternately immortality or denial of one’s existence. Will relays this to Jack, and Jack opens his laptop and starts sending a flurry of emails. Had they been alone in Hannibal’s office, the conversation may have spiraled off to other more beautiful places. Lecter was fond of artwork, literature, and drawing parallels between them and the corporeal world. Will hadn’t noticed how much he enjoyed it, hadn’t noticed how strictly unprofessional it was until he was talking to Lecter in front of Jack and suddenly realized how it would come across.

He says goodbye to Hannibal politely, and shuts the phone. He and Hannibal are playing a blood soaked game of chess, they aren’t friends and he had blundered so spectacularly in killing Abigail that Hannibal is inevitably going to kill him. Will’s head hurts and his thoughts are untidy. Jack takes his laptop, his phone, and he leaves Will to the gathering dark.

-x-

Will’s profile and Hannibal’s diagnosis lead the FBI to Georgia Madchen.

Jack and Will sit across from her mother, listening to her describe the monster that sprung from her womb. How she had feared her child, how she had tried but couldn’t possibly love such a creature. Will hates the mother unconditionally. He wants to feed her to his knives, reduce her to a splash of blood in the soil. Jack nods sympathetically.

Jack’s team give Will an accounting of the places Georgia would’ve been familiar with in her childhood, and Will selects the house of a childhood friend. Georgia’s mother had intimated that they had been friends out of fear not common interest or thinking, and that as a mother she had to break up the friendship before Georgia really hurt her.

Will is brooding on this in a dark squad car when he sees Georgia’s pale shadow detach itself from the forest and creep across the lawn towards the house. He hesitates, thinking about allowing her to finish what she came for, or telling her to leave town. Then he realizes what he’s feeling is pity, and he hates himself.

He draws his gun and leaves the squad car, knocking on the door, telling the terrified family that they are under attack.

He shoots Georgia Madchen in the forehead as she climbs through an open window.

Will feels sick and angry on the long drive home.

He pulls his car into his driveway, walking to the front door and fumbling in his pocket for his keys when he hears his cellphone going off inside, buzzing angrily on the counter where he'd left it to charge only a few nights ago.

The dogs are charging out the door, barking happily and buffeting his legs when he answers the phone. "Will," says Jack, "Abel Gideon escaped in transit."

"Fuck," Will says.

Chapter End Notes

This was scantily proofread so if I've made horrible spelling/grammar/continuity errors please please tell me and I'm sorry.
You lovely people make my day with every kudo or comment, thank you so much.

Graham

Chapter Summary

In which Will gets some bad news.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jack stations a police officer outside of Will's house. Will wonders just what Jack thinks the officer could possibly do to impede Abel Gideon. Maybe serve as a speed bump as Gideon stepped over the body.
Will doesn't think it's likely that Gideon will come after him, so all the police officer is really doing is getting the way of his game with Lecter. He needs to be planning a move, he thinks with slightly hysterical desperation, not sitting around in his house-cum-prison with his knives stuck in their hiding place waiting for the Ripper to come to rip him.

He cleans the house, even devoting a day to his attic and to his basement. He washes every scrap of cloth in the house, gives each of his seven dogs a bath. He finally fixes the squeaking cupboard in the kitchen and replaces the stair second from the bottom that had started splintering. It's been a week since Gideon escaped. Jack says the inquest over Madchen's death will be over soon and Will can get to work on the Gideon case but reminds him for the millionth time that he is safest at home right now.

Will sits in his house and he festers.

-x-

The inquest ends, no justice for the sick dead girl just as Jack had predicted, and Will gets to work.

Being given access to Gideon's activities is like being shown a macabre game of hopscotch, Will skipping between dead medical professionals instead of squares. The first few are easy to link to Gideon, all had been directly involved in his diagnosis at the trial stage. The last gives Will pause. He wasn't a co-worker, he wasn't involved in the trial, right now Will suspects a childhood friend but he can't find anything concrete. Will has spent a solid forty hours at the BSU before Beverly Katz shoves him out the door with strict instructions to go home. If she notices that Will has a folding file of case material on Gideon tucked inside his jacket she doesn't say anything.

-x-

Will's phone rings as he opens his door, again, and he reaches into his pocket to answer it when he becomes aware that something is off. He can't put his finger on it, but something in

his house is not as it should be. Maybe the air smells different or moves different. Will toes off his shoes, wraps his phone in his jacket to silence the buzzing, and pads from the entry way into the kitchen. It's empty and uncharacteristically fresh-smelling after all his cleaning. Will pulls a heavy knife from it's home in the wooden block on the counter. It feels all wrong in his hand, nothing like the beauties in his closet, it doesn't want and isn't thirsty.
From the kitchen, Will slips back through the foyer to the living room. Everything seems right, until he gets to the bench under the window where he had started remembering his father's trade of lure construction. It is a prop to complete his disguise, but Will has found that he rather enjoys the stillness and focus that the task requires. The chair is slightly wrong, the magnifying glass slightly tilted. Most troubling, the lure currently fixed in the clamp is not as he left it. Will bends to look closer when the sense of wrong swells up in his chest again. He draws himself back up and slips across the room to the back hallway and the disused dining room. Both are empty.

What remains is his room, or the abandoned upstairs. Will edges to the door of his room and silences his breathing, slows his heart. The room is absolutely black, even allowing his eyes to dilate in the dark reveals nothing in particular. Will wants his knives. The closet door shares a wall with the doorway he is standing in, and he slips sideways into the bedroom with his back to the wall.

Hands catch his arm, wrapping around his elbow, and a leg slips behind his knee, hooking forward. Will goes down, managing to twist himself so he lands painlessly but unable to do anything else before the stranger is on top of him. The kitchen knife is in his fist, but the grip is all wrong, the stranger grabs his wrist and slams it against the floor. Will feels something give and the knife slips from his grip.

He becomes aware of the sound of squeaking plastic, and of a smooth woodsy scent in his nose. "H-Hannibal?" he gasps, trying hard to get his feet back under him on the hard wood. "Principles, Will," Hannibal answers him, voice low and hot in his ear. There's such an elemental energy in the man, Will feels as if he is in the eye of a hurricane and Hannibal is all around him. He is face to face with the Chesapeake Ripper, and he is exactly as gorgeous as Will ever dared to hope. Hannibal's perfect mask is utterly gone, leaving Will to see his face looking almost contorted by expression. Will stares too long and feels the bite of steel at his stomach, and he comes alive again.

He is Georgia Madchen, and he shoves himself into a curve with his foot on the Ripper's hip. He kicks up at Lecter savagely, giving himself just enough room to hike an elbow up under his shoulder. He uses the elbow as pivot, swinging his legs out from under Lecter and coming up to hands and knees facing him. Lecter is rising to a lunge and Will blows by him, straight into the maw of his closet. The knives are in his hands as Lecter's hand slides around his throat. Lecter is reaching his other hand to Will's head, he's going to twist until Will lies limp and dead.

Where's his knife gone Will wonders distantly. His left handed knife spin in his hand until it's hilt up and Will pushes it backwards, trying for a thigh and trying to miss the femoral. Lecter spins away, but loses his perfect neck-snapping hold. Will follows the spin with his right handed knife coming up, slicing through the air between Will and Lecter's throat. Hannibal's

hand comes up and his knife is there again, it's a small wickedly curved blade, a linoleum cutter, and it catches around Will's knife as effectively as a medieval sword-breaker.

Will's hand knows this knife however, it is not like the kitchen knife had felt heavy and lifeless in his grip, and Lecter can't jerk the handle from his grasp. Will's left handed knife spins again and Will thrusts it forwards to Hannibal's belly. Hannibal drops straight backwards into a bridge and flips himself upright a few yards from Will. He is smiling like the Cheshire cat, all teeth and whimsy.

"Will," he says as warmly as sunlight. "You can call me that," Will agrees, "or the Biloxi Wolfman." Hannibal's eyes are dark and wide in the thin light from the doorway. "It's nice to see you as you are," Will says conversationally, "I've always been a great admirer of your work, Chesapeake Ripper." Hannibal circles back towards the doorway. The point of Will's right handed knife follows him. Hannibal reaches behind him and pulls a heavy something off Will's dresser, and throws it at Will. Will brings one of his feet into a high arcing kick, deflecting the object to the wall and coming back to rest as he had been before. Hannibal looks amused and something Will can't place.

He's likely not used to long fights with his prey, he's always struck Will as a killer who strikes from the shadows and only needs one. Will wonders why he lived through the first attack.

"I'm sorry about Abigail," Will says quietly and Lecter's expression darkens. "Why are you sorry?" he asks edging slightly closer to Will as if remembering that they are at an impasse with blades drawn rather than in his office. "I wanted to do you, to do us a favor," Will says trying bald honesty for a change, "and instead I reminded you of something," he pauses then shoves caution out the window and continues, "of someone painful."

Hannibal stares.

Coming back to himself, he says "she was a child, Will." His foot slides forward into a lunge and he slips neatly behind Will's guard, striking for Will's ribs. Will flips his right handed knife upside down and stabs downward, forcing Lecter to choose between completing the strike and his own arm. Lecter chooses his arm, and Will is glad this part of the profile is correct. But Lecter doesn't fall back as he'd thought, and rather he slips behind Will and drives his shoulder into Will's back, propelling him flat against the wall. "A child who was going to bring public scrutiny onto you and whatever happened to Nicholas Boyle!" Will gasps with the precious little air still in his lungs.

"There was a better way," Hannibal grits out, his teeth are at the nape of Will's neck. Will, getting desperate, stomps his heel back onto Lecter's insole. Lecter grunts low and harsh in his ear and for a whole second Will is hotly and wholly aroused. Then Hannibal Lecter is trying to kill him again.

Will manages to muscle a few inches of space between himself and the wall, and pulls his foot up, kicking backwards for Lecter's knee. He connects and Lecter is made unstable enough that Will can turn around him, tripping Lecter over his leg and sending them both to the ground.

Straddling Lecter's trim waist, Will rests a knife to Lecter's throat. It's so greedy in his hand that Will lets it just pierce the soft skin of Lecter's throat, crimson spilling over the edge of the blade in a thin, shining ribbon. Confident Hannibal is made immobile by the threat of death, he lets his second knife go and uses a free finger to gather a bit of the blood and bring it to his lips. He's tasted plenty of blood and it's all the same, coppery and warm. There's no way that Hannibal tastes any different but Will allows the fantasy that there is something different about this tang of metal on his tongue. Lecter is motionless beneath him, a blazing heat between his thighs. Will sits on his heels, ass right over Lecter's groin, the point of his knife right against the pulsing carotid.

"I couldn't kill Freddie," he says voice husky and alarmingly loud in the dark room, "I've threatened her often and publically, everyone would look at me first." Hannibal remains silent, breathing heavily through his nose. "Abigail didn't respect either of us enough to give up the idea of her book on our say so. Neither of us have the authority to restrict Freddie's access to Abigail," he pauses, "they would've found a way to talk anyway. Jack would want to know why we didn't want them to go public, what we had to hide."

He looks down at Lecter beseechingly, "I had to kill her Hannibal, I had to."

Lecter's breathing has slowed, his eyes slip shut. "I'm sorry," Will repeats himself, "for whoever you lost, and for Abigail." When Hannibal opens his eyes again, Will is struck speechless by the weight of sorrow he sees there.

This is the only way he could feel an emotion like this, he thinks from a place far away, he could never feel so powerfully on his own. It hurts so oddly, like it's growing inside of his chest and going to break through. He put this thing inside of Hannibal.

In a fit of…something, he tosses his knives onto the bed behind him, and watches as Hannibal brings up the linoleum knife. Will tips his jaw up. Instead of the kiss of steel, he feels air whistle by his ear as the knife joins his on the bed. He looks down at Hannibal, who watches him from behind a face both the same as the one he wears in his office and wholly different. Will's thighs squeak on the clear plastic coverall Hannibal wears.

"I forgive you, Will."

-x-

Hannibal abandons the plastic suit and sits incongruously in his three-piece suit at Will's kitchen counter, his big hands are wrapped around a steaming mug. Will enjoys the reversal of their usual position as he leans against the other side of the counter, pouring his own mug.

Hannibal tells him that he was surprised to find a piano in Will's living room. Will tells him that he's played since he was a child but hasn't had much time to practice since he started to work for the BSU. Hannibal tells him that's a shame, and Will has a feeling he's about to ask for a performance when Will's jacket buzzes where he left it by the door. Will makes an apologetic face and unwraps it. There are six missed calls from Jack and one from Beverly.

Will brings the phone to his ear.

“Will where have you been,” Jack says voice painfully loud over the tiny speaker, “Alana Bloom is dead.”

Chapter End Notes

I get so nervous when writing fight scene because I worry that I'll either give too much detail and it'll dissolve into my nerdery about self defense and martial arts, or I'll give too little and you, dear readers, will have no bloody clue what's going on.
Please let me know if either of these things have occurred, or if you've had a bad day, or a good day, or really anything at all I adore you all.

Pimms

Chapter Summary

In which a storm gathers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lecter rides with Will to Frederick Chilton's house. Chilton had been stabbed in the back, but had been alive when the paramedics had removed him and there is only a hasty chalk outline to show where he had lain, inches from what Will guesses is meant to be the right foot, is the body of Alana Bloom.

Hannibal hums lowly at this side. Alana is beautiful in death, hair like ink where it spills over the floor, her throat a rusty gash no longer scarlet with blood. "Gideon," Will declares with his voice uncharacteristically tight. To the degree that he could feel anything for other humans, he'd always been partial to Alana. She had done her best to shield him from the march of psychological progress, the endless inquisitive doctors and therapists.

"You're sure this is Gideon?" Jack asks from behind them. "Yeah," Will affirms, "I get it now. He moved from people involved in his trial to people who published about him. I was never in danger." He can't keep a note of accusation out of his voice.

"What was she doing here," Hannibal asks, "I'd always thought she'd loathed Chilton."

"I was hoping one of you could tell me that," Jack starts but a uniformed police officer with a bandage wrapped around her forehead clears her throat. Everyone turned to look at her. "She wanted to talk to Dr. Chilton about Gideon," she says voice small and wavering, "we were escorting her. We uh-"she clears her throat as her voice cracks with unshed tears, "we escorted her." Will bets that whoever the other officer was, they didn't survive the night.

Will stares into her eyes until she starts to cry, albeit silently, and he is absolutely certain she did nothing to ensure the death of Dr. Alana Bloom. Then he paces to the middle of the kitchen, turning slowly on his heel. When he comes back to where he started, he sees Hannibal in conversation with Beverly Katz. His head in angled down to meet her eyes and the wan light of Chilton's kitchen catches on his cheekbone. Will jerks his head back to the pattern of blood spatter on the countertops. "Gideon will be staying on the move," he says meditatively, "he doesn't expect to survive this. He wants to be finished before he's caught," Will pauses when the word sits wrong in his mouth, then amends it to, "or killed."

Jack nods seriously, tapping something out on his phone with the force of a man who sorely misses physical buttons. Hannibal is still talking to Katz, who has raised a gloved hand to prod the sharp line of his shirt collar. Hannibal says something about having cut himself

shaving, how he knows its impractical to use a straight razor but he prefers the closeness of the shave. Will's head is full of a dull buzzing because they're talking about his cut, the cut he put into the Chesapeake Ripper's soft throat.

He walks briskly from the kitchen on the pretense of looking at the window Gideon employed as a point of entry.

-x-

In Biloxi there is a certain amount of mythology about Detective Will Graham. The mythology wavers in equal parts between armchair diagnoses of increasingly arcane mental illnesses and some ambiguous assessment of natural talent of various kinds. Will is not sure which he prefers, but he enjoys being thought of in superhuman terms, even if it isn't helpful to be a serial killer who stands out in the mind. The upside of his reputation is that nobody invites him for a drink after work or shows up on his doorstep looking for a cup of sugar or a repository for leftover etouffe.

Will Graham's father died last year and he think he played the ensuing psychological assessment well, but the psychologist never quite meets his eyes and he's not sure if that's because she think he's creepy for not caring about his father or because he thinks like serial killers. He worries sometimes that he comes across as excessively creepy, but never for long.

Will's knives are like the embrace of a lover against his back, or how he imagines he is supposed to feel about naked people hugging him. The dark swamp at his back is alive with gulping frogs and humming insects. Will is glad for the hundredth time that he all but doused himself in mosquito repellent, even if his target smells him coming he is confident he can handle it. He's never snuck into an apartment complex before, but he's willing to try for the lobbyist who keeps blocking legislative review to regulations on animal testing. It's a flimsy excuse for him but he's been a good little detective and feels he deserves a reward. She does wear real fur, which is a bonus.

Will ends up climbing the outside of the building. There's no doorman and no electronic lock but he just can't shake his paranoia that someone is going to see a stranger in the hallway and call the cops prematurely. Fortunately the complex is brick and the hanging moss that afflicts Louisiana like a plague has not been allowed to entirely overrun the building. Will hauls himself onto the tiny balcony outside the lobbyist's window gratefully, shoulder muscles aflame with exertion.

The locks on the lobbyists windows are flimsy, but rusted through and Will has to use a bit more power than he'd like forcing them open. He is making a mental note to add grease to his kit when the dog starts barking.

Unlike his last few kills, this dog is clearly well loved and pampered. It's an Australian Shepard, purebred unless his profile is a complete mess. He's glad for the stray treat in his pocket and slips it to the Shepard with a warm smile and a fond pat on the head. The dog wags his tail, eats the treat happily, and goes quiet, but the damage has been done and the lobbyist appears in the doorway to the spare room saying "Rocky, what-" and then screams high and shrill.

Will is so entirely annoyed with her that he throws the first knife. He hasn't thrown knives for year but a dark god has its eye on Will that night because it hits her right in the throat and her scream cuts off with a croak. Will had intended to flay the skin around her shoulders off and wrap her in a stole, but he can already hear banging at the front door. He settles for sinking his knives into her chest in a perforated line from armpit to armpit. It's fast and choppy but the woman is quite dead so Will doesn't feel too disappointed.

He is disappointed that he can't stop himself from grabbing Rocky, tucking him under his arm, and ducking back out the window, riding the fire escape ladder to the ground and bolting back into the swamp. Rocky is obligingly silent all the way home, and doesn't bark again as long as Will owns him.

Will shaves him and has a devil of a time finding dog-safe dye, but nobody questions the rescued mutt Will adds to his collection, even though the dead lobbyist's missing prized purebred (he knew it) is the topic of much discussion for several weeks at the precinct.

-x-

Jack calls him the day after Alana's funeral and asks him to take a look at a man with his brain missing, taken out through his eyes.

Will does he asks, takes one look, and can bear no more. The groaning husk is a perversion of everything integral to his thinking and his process. Will does not adhere to a rigid set of rules the way Hannibal does, he prefers to act on impulse and enjoy every minute of it. He chooses his victims according to habit, but it's hardly a rule he would flinch at breaking. Still for the killer, because the man isn't a man any more even if he technically has a pulse, has no idea he was being punished. Her kill occurred the moment she took his brain out of his eyes, yet still the waste product left behind staggers around, utterly unaware that he has been killed.

Will isn't sure which part in particular disgusts him, but he feels like he has bitten into a bit of food expecting one flavor and gotten something entirely different.

He uses the excuse of his revulsion, evident even to Katz and her lackies, to slip into the neighboring office desperate for something more interesting or at least palatable. What Will finds is a case file on Gideon. It's been compiled in equal measure by local police and the BSU and that suggests to Will that there's plenty of copies of the information floating around and nobody will notice one has gone missing. He slips the file into his shirt, flat against his back where the silhouette won't be noticed, and it's not at all like the pressure of his knife harness but serves as a reminder of them waiting back at his house and he feels a little better.

He walks back into the lab feeling much refreshed and gives what little he can gather about the acupuncturist who created a zombie.

-x-

Hannibal looks like a man whose birthday has come early when he opens the door to his office for their appointment that week and finds Will sitting quietly in the lobby.

“New cologne?” he asks as Will turns sideways to fit between him and the doorframe. “No fish,” Will replies ruefully.

Hannibal’s eyes flash with interest as something in his thoughts slots into place. It’s a look Will has seen on plenty of therapists throughout the years. “Do me a favor,” he says as he sits down in his usual chair, “and publish anything you’re writing about me posthumously.”

“After your death or mine,” Hannibal asks him gravely, settling in across from him.

“Whichever comes first,” Will says, and what he means is “and there’s plenty out there who want to kill us, so can we please not kill each other?” Hannibal’s smile is smooth and gentle, Will wants to think that means he’s accepted Will’s proposal but Will knows better than to assume anything about the Ripper.

So, Will thinks, I’m going to have to tie him down. His brain desperately wants to run with that metaphor, and Will is a little disturbed by how active his libido has been recently. He files it under Things to Deal With Later.

“Jack isn’t going to catch Gideon.”

Hannibal cocks his head as a clear invitation for him to continue.

“Law enforcement can’t move fast enough to catch Gideon,” Will elaborates running a hand over his scruff. He thinks about Hannibal’s remark about straight razors, then hates himself for thinking about it. Scruff makes a jawline hard to remember, and shaving is a quick way to transform his face. It’s practical he reminds himself firmly.

Hannibal is still watching him silently. Will wonders if he’s recording their conversations as a last-minute out to go with that altered fishing lure and is waiting for Will to say something that’s concretely incriminating.

Will thinks about the steam tunnels under Hannibal’s house when he says “I miss Alana.”

“An ugly fate for a beautiful person,” Hannibal agrees, tone somber. That’s the worst part of the whole thing for him, probably. Hannibal can find another Alana but he abhors the contamination of beauty.
“Jack will catch Gideon eventually,” Hannibal says and something about the way he says it is sly, testing. “You said it yourself, Gideon isn’t expecting to escape.”

“And he’ll die instantly from a gunshot,” Will agrees, choosing his words one by one, “or he’ll be sent back to Chilton’s hospital.” Will’s tone is the mild consideration of law-abiding citizen who finds these solutions to be correct and proper, and is simply coming to terms with them. He wills his true intent to show through his eyes and given Hannibal’s indulgent smile, it does.

“I wonder if you would like to have dinner with me, Will” Hannibal asks him, smoothing out a crease in his trousers. Will’s mouth goes rather dry. “Tonight?” he asks breathlessly.

“It’s a bit late,” Hannibal admonishes him, though gently, “I was thinking tomorrow.”

He’s right, of course. Will hopes he doesn’t look too depressed by the prospect.

“Tomorrow it is, then,” Will says, and he slumps more comfortably in the chair. He hadn’t even realized he had leaned forward. Hannibal leads them towards more mundane questions concerning Will’s profile of Gideon, which Will realizes is only practical of him and will certainly be useful during their meeting tomorrow, but he still feels like he has been offered a prize and then deprived before he can collect.

Chapter End Notes

Man how are you guys handling the AO3 server move? I feel like such an addict every time I open a new AO3 tab and it doesn't immediately go through.

Brown

Chapter Summary

In which Will makes poor life choices and Hannibal gets his hands dirty.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will's body refuses to come back under control and when Will arrives back home he is thoroughly sick of its nagging. He finds the scruffy jeans he wore to the Baltimore Archives, unworn and unwashed since, and digs out the phone number of the student he met down there. It's creeping up on too late for decent hours, but the man was a PhD candidate, if Will remembers rightly, and he imagines the man has utterly forgotten what exactly decent hours are meant to be. He hits the call button.

"Hello?" the voice is so fresh, so guileless, Will can't help feeling just a little bit toothy. "Hi," he says slipping into a memory of a police cadet he had known at the academy, "we met in the archives? I uh," he laughs self-deprecatingly, "I lost the number."

"I was afraid you weren't interested," the student replies sounding heart-wrenchingly flattered to be remembered.

"No!" Will replies with forced enthusiasm, running a comb through Ash's long hair. "Just," he laughs again, "an idiot."

"Do you want to get coffee?" the student asks suddenly, then, "oh! Oh, I didn't see the time, it's probably-" Will cuts him off, "it's fine," he says, rummaging for a different pair of jeans, ones that sit a little lower and a little tighter, "if you'll be up for a bit, we can definitely get coffee."

"I'm Matthew," the student blurts out, "Matthew Brown."

"Elliot," Will replies, "Elliot Fischer". He dumps food into the assorted dog bowls, pausing to scratch each dog in turn, then locks the door and drives all the way back to Baltimore. Anything for some peace and quiet.

-x-

Matthew blinks up at him from his nest of blueprints, engineering textbooks, and napkins with hastily scribbled calculations. Will slides onto the bench across from him and licks his lips obviously. Matthew stares unreservedly, clearly just as desperate as Will for an uncomplicated fuck.

The ensuing conversation is an exercise in remembering the cadet Will had chosen to wear for Matthew, dragging little preferences and speech patterns out of the depths of memory. It's mostly effortless but he does spent an embarrassingly long time trying to decide between jams for his toast, especially considering that it's not a detail that matters to Matthew or anybody.

Matthew's apartment is cramped and dim, but Will has lived in worse. Matthew is locking the door behind him when Will shrugs out of his shirt. Matthew turns back around and stares at him. Will flexes his abs obligingly and Matthew lets slip a high giggle, then claps a hand over his mouth. "Wow," he exclaims, and Will is absolutely done with listening to him talk, so he grabs him by the hair and drags his head back to mouth at his neck. He realizes his lips are following the line his knife had cut on a different neck the night before, and nips the offending skin in annoyance. Matthew yelps.

-x-

Hannibal smells him when Will steps through his door. Will can only just hear the intake of breath, but he wonders what Hannibal is looking for. He had made a quick stop back in Wolf Trap for his harness, his gloves, his favorite killing jacket. Hannibal is wearing an outfit that amounts, by his standard, to functional casual. Sleekly fitted black trousers that may or may not be jeans, heavy boots, a warm coat, and his own pair of gloves. No plastic suit for him tonight.

Hannibal is making a face at him that seems almost exasperated and Will wonders exactly how powerful his sense of smell is. He took a shower before driving over, and changed his clothes so Hannibal can't smell Matthew on him. He hopes Hannibal can't smell Matthew on him although he couldn't say why. The Ripper hadn't exactly made any particular overtures towards him, had barely agreed to a partnership. Really, Will thinks, he has no business being annoyed.

"Gideon is going to target a Professor at Baltimore University next." Will says as the door closes heavily. Hannibal nods his head in a way that, on anyone else, would be deferential. "His house is maybe forty minutes from here," Will continues praying he hasn't fucked up a single thing in his plan. If he were by himself it would be fine, he would just roll with it, but now he's working with the honest-to-God Chesapeake Ripper and the man is detail obsessive and with good reason. He has a much higher body count than Will does, even with a conservative estimate, and there's even fewer leads on him. "I suggest that we park outside the local grocery store, it's a few blocks over," Will sketches out a vague map of the neighborhood in the air between them, "and walk over. Gideon is probably going to use the alleyway, and it's our best option too, then hop the garden fence or pick the lock."

Hannibal nods, and adjusts his cuffs unnecessarily showing Will the flash of a blade hidden within. "How long do we have," Hannibal asks and his voice is low, as if they are in public and he doesn't want to be overheard. "I'd guess two or three hours," Will answers. Hannibal has forgone his usual cologne tonight, Will enjoys the scent but now he can't stop wondering how Hannibal smells without it. The cut on his neck has gone a soft pink and it will probably heal without a scar. Will is staring but Hannibal seems more amused than offended.

“Something to eat while we wait?” Hannibal asks him politely, and Will has been absolutely dying to try something he’s cooked. Nobody will shut up about how talented the man is in the kitchen, and Will isn’t much of a meat eater but then, he’s never had the other white meat.

He is disappointed when Hannibal produces a selection of fruit, but cheers up when Hannibal allows him to eat sitting on his pristine counters. His mood is further improved when he picks up a chunk of melon from its spice and syrup bath with his fingers, and Hannibal can’t quite hide a twitch of his lips at his audacity. His gaze is flatteringly steady as Will slips the melon into his mouth with unnecessary showmanship and Hannibal kept on watching as Will sucked the remaining syrup off the pad of his own thumb. Will smiled at him as he set his hand back down, and Hannibal said nothing but neither did he offer Will a fork.
Hannibal never struck him as a man to enjoy kitchen sex, Will had figured him as someone who very deliberately distinguished between sex and food, but he could’ve been wrong about that. Then again, he might not have escaped the “food” category either. Will was looking forward to finding out.

-x-

They took Will’s car to the aforementioned grocery, Hannibal looking entirely out of place in the passenger seat of Will’s rickety old Chevy. Hannibal had made an argument for his hulking Bentley with its ample trunk space, but Will countered with his car’s anonymity. Hannibal’s profile was lit periodically by the streetlights they drove past. Will tried not to glance over with every flash of yellow light.
They park. Will leads the way through the snaking alleys between fenced off gardens and below kitchen windows. Hannibal is a ghost at his back, every bit as silent as Will. His coat doesn’t flap, his breathing is silent, he deftly avoids puddles and scattered glass. Will is making every effort to pay as much attention to his own movements as he is to the Chesapeake Ripper’s.

They come up on the professor’s garden. Will jerks his head at the gate to signify “this is the one”. He kneels down, the lock is a cheap one with only three pins to contend with, and when he draws back up to his full height, Hannibal is behind him. Hannibal is right behind him.

“Don’t make too much of a mess,” Hannibal says, mouth right against Will’s ear and his breath seems too hot to have come from a human, it’s a brand on Will’s neck. He turns his head as far as he can, their mouths are so close. “Don’t worry,” Will murmurs eyes on Hannibal’s lips rather than his eyes, “I won’t spoil the meat.”

The professor lives in a two story craftsman-style house, so they have options. Will is considering the basement windows with the second story window above them shatters in a spectacular spray of glass. Will’s instincts are to get up against the house, but Hannibal’s hand wraps into the back of his jacket and jerks him back into the darkest shadows which are against the garden wall.

Abel Gideon leans out of the window, surveying the corpse in the garden, “oops,” he exclaims to the empty air. As soon as he ducks back into the house, Hannibal’s hand is flat on his back, propelling him at full speed to the back door which, as it turns out, is unlocked. They slip into the house, slightly less soundless than before, to hear Gideon clumping down the wooden staircase. From where he is, Will can see that Gideon has three options. The first

is the front door in front of him, Will doubts he will choose that one, the second is the room to his left, which Will bets is the dining room attached to the kitchen Will and Hannibal are standing in, and the third is the hallway Will is looking down.

Turning, he gestures with his head to the dining room and Hannibal ghosts away to vanish in the shadow. Gideon has paused obligingly to peer out the window set into the front door, likely checking for police sirens or curious neighbors, but all it really accomplishes is giving Will the chance to take several long strides, closing the distance between himself and Gideon. He allows his last step to connect loudly with the hardwood floor and Gideon starts, turning around to look at him. “Special Agent Graham,” he drawls and Will gives him a grin that has nothing human behind it. Gideon is taken aback but he makes up his mind quickly and barrels down the short hallway towards Will.

Will’s knives leap into his hands like living things and Will swings his left handed knife in an inviting vertical arc. Gideon catches his left arm and wheels, trying to throw Will over his hip. Will locks his knees, spins his right handed knife downwards, and stabs with all of his weight and Gideon’s own pull. Gideon doesn’t have Hannibal’s reflexes nor Will’s training and the knife connects, sinking deep into Gideon’s shoulder and hitting bone. Gideon howls and staggers back down the hallway to the door, taking Will’s knife, which is stuck fast, with him. Unfortunately for Gideon, he staggers right into the solid body of Hannibal Lecter.
It would’ve been easy for Hannibal to grab his jaw and slit his throat. Instead, he plants a foot on Gideon’s back and pushes him to the ground, grabbing his wounded arm as he goes and neatly dislocating the shoulder with an audible crack. Gideon howls again. Foot squarely in the middle of Gideon’s back and one hand holding his dislocated arm, Hannibal takes the hilt of Will’s knife and jerks it out of Gideon’s shoulder with no small effort. He admires the blade and tries its balance in his own hand. Much as Will admires the Ripper, he isn’t prepared for how possessive he feels about his knives. Hannibal, perhaps catching his darkening expression, spins the knife between his fingers and offers it, hilt first, back to Will.

Will takes it, feeling warm.

Hannibal nods down at Gideon, allowing Will to make the first cut. Will crouches over Gideon, who is going a little woozy if his pupils are anything to go by, and Hannibal obligingly moves his foot down to the base of his spine. Will takes his time separating the skin from the spine, but he doesn’t dawdle because this is a nice neighborhood and somebody has certainly heard something by now.

When the full expanse of the spine that support Gideon’s rib cage is exposed, Will sits back on his hips and contemplates the body before him with satisfaction. Sensing he is done, Hannibal kneels down and finally cuts Gideon’s throat, letting the blood fountain out keeping both he and Will out of the spray. After a few seconds the spurting has lapsed to a more sedate trickle and Hannibal flops Gideon’s body onto his butt, careful to keep Will’s handiwork off the ground. Will takes over, supporting Gideon under the armpits as Hannibal delicately cuts away Gideon’s trousers to expose his thighs, from which Hannibal takes six long cuts with a devastatingly precise scalpel. Hannibal wraps the cuts in a piece of butcher paper he produced from the depths of his long coat, and Will hauls the corpse to the dining table where he leaves it draped over the head of the table so the street lights outside will catch the wet shine of his spine to its full effect. He can’t resist stabbing Gideon one last time, right

through the top of his skull, but Hannibal takes him the elbow and drags him back out the open kitchen door before he can get any further.

-x-

Hannibal is setting his parcel of meat in the cooler in Will's trunk when Will's phone rings. Will flips it open and nestles it between his shoulder and ear, breathing into his cold hands in the grocery parking lot. "Hey Elliot," it's Matthew's voice. Will assumes the richer, higher voice he uses for Elliot and answers warmly, "Matthew. Can I call you back?"

"Sure," Matthew answers, breathless and earnest and absolutely innocent, "but did you want to come over?"

Will thinks about Hannibal holding the knife, his knife, and he thinks about Hannibal peeling up the chunks of leg muscle. The man himself watches him over the roof of the car. "Yeah, can you give me an hour or so?"

"Perfect," Matthew breathes in his ear.

Hannibal doesn't say anything but his face is back to its exasperated expression from earlier. "Let's get you home," Will says, he doesn't remember telling his voice to be that husky which is disproportionately terrifying, "don't want your meat to spoil."

Chapter End Notes

Poor Matthew.

Another big thank you for your comments and kudos, they are life itself.

Lass

Chapter Summary

In which an error is rectified.

Chapter Notes

Guys I'm not kidding about the gore in this chapter. Just a warning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sex was good. It wasn't especially memorable but Will is out of breath and pleasantly heavy as he lays flat out in Matthew's bed.

Matthew smiled at him sweetly and angles his jaw for a kiss. Will obliges him before he kicks the thin sheet off and retreats to the rattling shower. He dropped another kiss on the salty skin between Matthew's shoulders on his way out the door and for a moment seriously considers sinking his teeth into the soft, vulnerable skin and tearing back the thin flesh. He picked up his coat instead and tried not to make too much noise on the way out.

Dawn was breaking when he arrived at home. A few of the dogs managed a tail wag or a soft whuff of greeting. Will padded through the quiet house and fell into bed face down and was immediately asleep.

When Will woke up, he let the dogs out and staggered on heavy legs to the mailbox. In addition to the usual nonsense, Will found a heavy cream-colored envelope bearing no stamp but his name was inscribed in flowing dark red ink. Will could guess what he'd find inside but he still grinned at the dinner invitation from "cordially yours, Hannibal Lecter M.D." Will wondered if anyone else will be attending or Hannibal will be arranging the two of them in his dining room exhibit. He figured that either way, it was worth breaking out a nice suit for the occasion.

-x-

Hannibal's house loomed like a mausoleum from where Will sat in his car across the street. Will realized suddenly that this might be the night that he dies. His knives would have disrupted the line of his closely tailored suit jacket, but he does have a savage little knife in a holster on his ankle. He doesn't kid himself that he could kill the Ripper with it, but it feels nice to have even that small comfort. Maybe he could delay the man long enough to get away. He snorted a laugh into the empty car.

Will walked across the street without any of his masks on. His stride was long and easy, his posture was upright and confident. He spared a fleeting thought for what Alana would say if she were alive to see him. Will was exactly on time when he knocked on Hannibal's sleek hardwood door. Hannibal opened it immediately. He was as resplendent as Will has ever seen him, a picture in midnight blue punctuated by the red flowers on his grey silk tie. He smiled broadly, and it's the least guarded smile he has ever given Will. Will felt that much more apprehensive.

Hannibal led him through the hall rather than the gleaming kitchen, their footsteps clicked loudly on the dark hardwood, and the tension was so thick that Will barely notices the silence. Two places had been laid but rather than having them sit across from each other, Hannibal had set them on one corner of the table. Will sat, back preternaturally straight, and for a moment he swore he felt the ghost of a touch through the short hair on the back of his neck.

The first course Hannibal introduced as roasted "leg", with Thai spices. He set it before Will with an efficient elegance. Will noticed belatedly that there is no elaborate centerpiece like he had seen when he'd interrupted Hannibal's dinner with Tobias Budge. Will's back was to a high wall of cooking herbs, and he faced a set of French doors which look out over a walled garden. It also afforded Will a ghostly reflection of himself and of Hannibal's other side. He watched through discretely lowered lashes as Hannibal withdrew his chair and sat fluidly.

The food, as he had been promised, was amazing. Gideon's thigh muscle has been made succulently tender with a tough outer skin that seems as if has been layered, packed, and layered again with intense flavor. It was at once earthy, warm and homey, as well as light and sunny with lemongrass and coconut flavors. Will murmured praises between bites. Hannibal was largely silent, electing to watch Will eat with an inscrutable expression fixed on his face. Will waited. Will waited for poison to set in. For a knife to sprout from his eye socket. But they finish their food, and then their wine, and watch each other.

Hannibal stood so suddenly Will jerked back in his seat. He smiled with what seems like genuine amusement and he slipped a hand under Will's plate, which of course sat on another, larger plate, and absconded to the kitchen. To Will's surprise, he didn't return with another set of plates, but rather walked straight through the dining room. He paused at the far door and held up a single finger in the universal "wait a minute" gesture, smiling like he and Will were sharing an inside joke, and strode out of the room. Will shifted his foot until he can feel the blade in its holster against his ankle.

Hannibal returned walking backwards and the reason became clear as he fully entered the room. He was pulling a wheelchair with him, Will abruptly noticed that there was no chair at the table across from him. Hannibal spun the chair, pushed it up to the table across from Will, and Will came face to face with Matthew Brown.

Matthew's mouth had been duct taped shut and his eyes widened comically large when he saw Will. He immediately started trying to communicate with Will using just his eyes, tears beading at the corners and slipping silently down his cheeks. Will shushed him silently, pursing his lips and shaking his head.

Hannibal reappeared having shed his suit jacket and carrying what looked to be a fancy version of a fondue pot, which he set on the table between Will and Matthew. “Hannibal,” Will said and his tone was familiar, gently chiding, “don’t you think you’ve taken the idea of locally sourced meat a little far?” Hannibal’s answer grin was positively wolfish. “Ethical eating is very important, Will,” Hannibal told him mildly, Matthew began to sob in earnest great heaving gasps that were largely muffled by the duct tape but still wheezed through his nose.

Hannibal, leaning over Matthew’s shoulder and working backwards, opened Matthew’s shirt exposing both Matthew’s shuddering ribs and the red suck marks Will had left on him the night before. Will watched calmly and Hannibal produced a scalpel, and drew a neat curve over Matthew’s chest. Bone shears came next, snapping deafeningly loudly in the quiet dining room. Matthew fell unconscious, his head lolling backwards into Hannibal’s broad chest. Hannibal drew surgical clamps from where he had apparently left them in Matthew’s lap, and clamped off the major blood vessels. Taking up his scalpel again, Hannibal cut through the muscle, veins, and connective tissue surrounding Matthew’s heart, and pulled it from his chest. Blood had been steadily seeping down Matthew’s chest, and as the heart came away an unclamped artery shot a spray of blood across Hannibal’s table, catching Will in the face. Will licked the hot blood from his lips and dabbed at his forehead and cheeks with his napkin.

Setting the heart on a wooden cutting board, Hannibal excised a thin sliver of meat from the heart, skewered it with a thin metal fork, and set it in the oil within the fondue pot. He did this five more times until the six fondue forks were arranged in a neat ring in the fondue pot. Across from Will, Matthew’s skin had begun to take on a greyish cast. The hole in his chest yawned open, black and wet.

Hannibal ducked back into the kitchen and returned with a tray bearing an array of small pots, each filled with a different mix of seasoning. He was wearing his suit jacket again, and sat down again with a flourish. His smile was uncharacteristically open. He was waiting for Will to react, looking for any sign of hurt or anger. Will made himself relax even further into his chair.

Glancing at his watch, Hannibal reached to the fondue pot and plucked forth one of the knives. The purple-red meat had become a ruddy brown, and Hannibal rolled it neatly in one of the seasoning pots with a practiced twist of his hand. Hannibal met Will’s gaze and held it, but didn’t offer the fork, instead he held the meat to Will’s lips.

Will’s heart picked up its pace, and Will decided that Hannibal had left himself too open to squander the opportunity. He turned his head, letting his lips slide along the sliver of meat. He did not miss the slight dilation of Hannibal’s pupils. Will let his tongue slide out, hooking the end of the fork between his tongue and his upper teeth, showing Hannibal both as he accepted the meat. It was, of course, amazing. The spices were tangy and savory, the meat was succulent and tender, and best of all: Hannibal was absolutely transfixed by Will’s mouth.
When Hannibal’s eyes flickered from Will’s lips back to his eyes, Will could swear he saw the faint hint of a blush. He smiled, murmuring “delicious”.

Hannibal went very still, then drew himself up straight. He set the fondue fork down carefully, then withdrew the others from the oil and split them between his plate and Will's. Sensing that he had been a little too effective, Will decided to press his advantage. As he and Hannibal worked their way through the heart, he let the oil make his lips shine. He plucked the meat from its fork and sucked it off his fingers. When he encountered an especially well cooked or seasoned piece, Will moaned shamelessly. Not so loud as to be gauche, but with a sincerity that made even Hannibal fidget.

When the heart was gone. Hannibal rose to clear their plates. Moving quietly, Will followed him into the gleaming kitchen. Hannibal set the plates in the sink and when he turned back, Will was there. Will moved slowly enough that Hannibal could slip away if he wished, but when Hannibal remained still, Will pressed his advantage. He walked them back against the cabinets, leaning his hands against the counter top which pressed their chests together. Hannibal's eyes were trained on Will's mouth, so Will finally, finally, pressed their mouths together.

With the taste of Matthew's heart fresh on his tongue, Will couldn't help but compare the sweet pleading of Matthew's kisses to the hungry pull of Hannibal's kisses. Hannibal kissed like he ate, with relish, savor, and passion, and of course with his very sharp teeth. Hannibal sucked Will's tongue into his mouth and Will felt the pinch of those teeth, and the copper taste of blood swamped his mouth. Hannibal licked Will's lips and Will laughed hoarse and breathless into Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal's hands, which had so far been politely at his sides, shifted. Hannibal brought one hand to the nape of Will's neck and clamped around it like a vice. The other hand dropped to the dip of Will's spine and hauled him even closer to Hannibal's body. Will obligingly tilted his hips so one of his legs slid between both of Hannibal's, and Hannibal, unbelievably, groaned low in his chest.

Will thought this was a decent invitation to keep going and rocked his hip down and back up such that his thigh slid against Hannibal's groin. Will wasn't quite sure what happened next, and he was more than a little alarmed by that fact, but suddenly he was on the tiled kitchen floor and there was no air in his lungs. Hannibal had followed him down, and crouched over Will like a monster in a Hollywood film, balanced between his hands on either side of Will's head and the balls of his feet. Will curled up and hooked his heels around Hannibal's knees and pulled his hips back to the floor, forcing Hannibal to lay flat on top of Will. Hannibal shot him a look that was equally warning and amusement, and nipped and Will's lips. Belatedly, Will reflected that for anyone else it would've been a savage bite and Will thought he felt a bit of his lip go with Hannibal's teeth.

"On the floor, Hannibal?" Will teased around the taste of his own blood. "This is your fault," Hannibal countered, punctuating every other word with a sucking kiss, "I would have been perfectly content to take you to bed." Will hummed in response with an absolutely unapologetic tone, and arched his back so that their groins would rub together. Hannibal's lips curled up away from his teeth and Will realized he could feel Hannibal's hard cock through his pants. Will see's spots in front of his eyes and can barely catch his breath because he made the Chesapeake Ripper hard.

Will makes an executive decision to move things along, the kitchen floor is not the place for slow, reverent sex. Reaching between their bodies, and catching on Hannibal's shirt on the

way down, he undid his belt with a few efficient tugs. Hannibal shifted his weight over so he was fully on one hand, and undid his own belt. Will scrabbled at Hannibal's fly and then his own and after some undignified rummaging around, Will took both their cocks in his hand. Hannibal resorted to bracing himself on his hands, giving Will to work, his legs spread wide and slack on either side of Will. His face was flatteringly flushed, and Will craned his head up to taste the heat under Hannibal's cheeks, Hannibal snapped his teeth in retaliation, but it lacked the force of his earlier bites.

Will sped up his strokes, feeling Hannibal's cock beginning to seep pre-come. Hannibal started to breathe more heavily, his mouth falling open to pant. Will craned his head up again and sucked Hannibal's lower lip into his mouth, chewing on it without malice, and Hannibal bucked his hips down, pinning Will's hand between their hip bones. Will could see the pulse in Hannibal's neck, and on impulse brought his free hand, which had been enjoying the strength of Hannibal's back muscles, to rest gently against Hannibal's neck. Hannibal's eyes snapped to Will's, and Will gentled his eyes even as his mouth curved to show his teeth, the pulse under Will's finger tips rushed and pulse. Hannibal's eyes rolled back and Will figured that he was close, so he squeezed the hand around Hannibal's neck, and let go of his own cock in favor of working Hannibal's more intensely. Sweeping his thumb over the weeping head of Hannibal's cock, Will leaned up to rest his mouth against his ear, and whispered "Ripper". Hannibal came with a shout that reverberated from the kitchen walls. He fell to his forearms, and turned his head away from Will's face so he could catch his breath. Will rubbed his hands over Hannibal's back muscles with soothing pressure, ignoring the protesting pulse in his own cock.

Abruptly, Hannibal sat up, resting his haunches on his heels, and he stared down at Will as he took him in hand. Will moved his hands to help, but Hannibal batted his hands away, and with his free hand rucked Will's shirt up, dragging short neat nails over Will's stomach. Will rolled his head on the cold tile. Hannibal grabbed Will's wrist with his free hand, and brought it up, pushing Will's own fingers, still coated with Hannibal's come, against Will's lips. Will opened his eyes and met Hannibal's shadowed stare, taking his fingers into his mouth and sucking the come from his fingers. "Will," Hannibal whispered and his voice sounded strange, low and strained, "Will, come for me."

Will couldn't imagine why Hannibal thought he could command an involuntary action but all at once the muscles in his lower belly and hips seized, his back arched up away from the floor, and he was coming so hard his vision blurred. He slumped against the floor breathing hard, the coolness of the tile suddenly pleasant against his hot skin. Sweat had gathered between his shoulder-blades and prickled against the skin of his lower back. Hannibal was gazing down at him with something like reverence.

Will dragged his hands over Hannibal's shirt, smearing the fine fabric with saliva and drying come. Hannibal caught the hand and sucked the fingers into his mouth, dragging his teeth against the flesh of Will's fingers to clean them more thoroughly. Will recalled Matthew, dead in the dining room with his chest black and wide, and felt his breath catch and Hannibal took Will's fingers even deeper into his mouth, wrapping his lips around the longest bones where finger met palm. As if sensing his thoughts, Hannibal set his teeth against the vulnerable joint, and gradually increased the pressure until Will squirmed under him. He smiled around

Will's fingers, and then let them fall from his mouth, shining with saliva and still very much intact.

"Did the French creole call you Loup-Garou?" Hannibal asked him, now using his fingers to explore the lines of Will's torso. "Mhm," Will hummed in agreement. "Never figured out why they settled on wolfman rather than werewolf in the English," he paused, "I remember being surprised they didn't call me after Jack the Ripper, but I'm glad they didn't, now." He laughed, "very embarrassing to have two Rippers in Baltimore." Hannibal shuddered again, the way he always did when Will mentioned his stage name, so to speak.

"I'm not especially interested in sharing, Will," Hannibal murmured, his gaze beginning to regain some of its academic focus. "Alright," Will agreed, "then I'm yours." Hannibal's eyes flicked up, very obviously looking from the kitchen into the dining room where Matthew sat dead, "just like that?"

"Just like that." Will affirmed. "You were driving me crazy and I couldn't," Will twisted his mouth to convey frustration, "I couldn't figure out if you were interested in me, or in," he gestured vaguely and their bodies, "this at all."

Hannibal gave his version of rolling his eyes, sliding his eyelids half shut and sighing through his nose. Will grinned sheepishly, "to be fair," he teased, "I was more than a little star struck." Hannibal's gaze sparked and he lowered his torso back down with luxurious lethargy and kissed Will thoroughly. "You'll stay," Hannibal asked though his tone was one of a statement. "Yeah," Will breathed, and they peeled themselves off the floor with joints beginning to ache and muscles beginning to protest, and put themselves together just enough for the walk upstairs.

-x-

When Will left the Biloxi police force to attend FBI academy, he loaded the dogs into the car and made the long drive to Baltimore. They made the drive in two days, and in the interim stopped in a roadside hotel that seemed too surprised to have a guest who paid with a check rather than in cash to care about Will's having dogs.

Will hadn't been feeling twitchy, he'd been well behaved in fact so he didn't feel guilty at all when he'd ended up having to murder his neighbors. Falling asleep for the night Will had heard a dog's yelp next door, and a moment later, another. Will checked out of the hotel the next morning, drove the dogs to a shady park not far down the road, and let them run for a few hours. Then he loaded them back into the car and left the windows cracked and the AC running while he made the walk back to the hotel.

His knives had been packed away and hidden in a secondary compartment in Will's trunk, so he was more than a little annoyed to be working with a folding belt knife. He explained this to the man he was working open with it as he sawed. The man had little to say for himself beyond "oh god please no don't" and Will didn't think that was much of an explanation at all.

The fifth dog was a boxer, and Will named her Acorn for the rich brown of her fur.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for your comments. As ever I am intensely nervous every time I write sex or violence that it's become confusing jumble of bodies and pronouns so please let me know about anything that troubles you. And not just about the porn, I'm really enjoying hearing reactions and interpretations of my Hannibal. I realize he's fairly unconventional but I hope he'll grow on you.

Ingram

Chapter Summary

In which Will and Hannibal are incorrigible.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Will wakes the next morning, he is in equal parts surprised that he fell asleep in another person's bed and that Hannibal is himself fast asleep. His head pillowed in the crook of his arm breathing deep and even. Without the gel holding it in place, Hannibal's hair flops low over his forehead. The early morning light is especially flattering to Hannibal's darker skin. Will jerks his head away, annoyed at himself for staring for so long, pulls on his trousers and slips downstairs.

Feeling hungry, Will helps himself to the left over roasted leg. Without its lemongrass bath, the meat is barely distinguishable from well cooked pork. Will leans against the counter barefoot, feeling the pleasantly chill morning air against his back, and allows himself to chew slowly trying to feel some of Hannibal's love of food.

Stomach filled, Will decides to be productive. He moves to the dining room, retrieves the plates and the fondue pot and sets them to soaking in the sink. All that's left is the blood spray on the table and chairs, and poor Matthew himself. Feeling awkward about rummaging through Hannibal's house for powerful cleaners, Will decides to deal with Matthew and pats the corpse on his now frigid cheek. Rigor has begun to set in and Matthew's arms and legs are pushing against the restraints. Hoping he won't get killed for his presumption, Will releases the locks on the wheelchair and pushes it through to the kitchen, finding the trapdoor he had found so many weeks ago and, laughing quietly, bodily tosses the corpse down the steep stairwell. He follows, rather more sedately, and hefts the corpse with his arms under Matthew's armpits, fists clasped under his ribs. Getting Matthew onto the surgical table is more of challenge than he is willing to accept at this hour of the morning, so Will drags the corpse to the band-saw instead.

Will wiggles the corpse into a variety of increasingly undignified positions until he's separated the limbs and head from the torso. He imagines Hannibal won't want any of the meat, as long as Matthew has been allowed to sit at room temperature, so he stacks the parts on the surgical table to be dealt with later. He is working with his back to the stairs, so he's rather proud of himself for not striking when he feels arms snake around his belly.

Hannibal's voice is hoarse with sleep when he murmurs in Will's ear, but he doesn't sound upset which is likely why Will is still breathing, "how did you find this place, you clever

thing?" Hannibal punctuates his question with a scrape of his teeth over the protruding vertebra between neck and shoulders and follows that with a kiss to the same.

"Backwards, actually," Will says, bracing himself on the heels of his hands and bowing his head to give Hannibal more room to work. Hannibal hummed his interest and slid his thumbs over the curve of Will's ribs, feeling the heavy muscle underneath. "I realized you had to have a discrete way in and out of your house when I realized you had access to Miriam Lass, so I," Will's words were completely cut off as Hannibal's hands slid around to his front, one thumb scraping across a nipple and the other hand sliding over the relative softness of his lower belly and into the front of his trousers.

"Go on, Will," Hannibal rumbled, pulling one of Will's earlobes into his mouth and sucking. The hand in his trousers was feeling along his hip bones and the crease between torso and leg, but aggravatingly avoiding his cock entirely. "So," Will ground out with mock irritation, "I went to the archives, and found blueprints for," Hannibal dragged his fingernails through Will's pubic hair and pinched the nipple in his other hand. Will heard a gasp, realizing belatedly that it was his, "for the steam tunnels," Hannibal ducked his head to Will's neck, sucking hard at the skin where neck joined shoulder, Will was sure he'd have a magnificent bruise there. "I came here, during our appointment," and here Hannibal bit the meat of his trapezius hard, "sorry," Will added feeling breathless, "and I found the trap door and the," Hannibal abruptly grabbed his hips in his big hands, and spun Will so that the base of his spine hit the operating table at an uncomfortable angle, and then Hannibal dropped to his knees.

Will huffed out a shuddering gasp and Hannibal drew his cock from his pants, licked his palm firmly, and gave him a few sharp strokes. "I found the kidneys," Will's voice was almost a whine, irregular and thready, Hannibal took the head of his cock into his mouth. "I found the arms," Hannibal sucked hard on the head, then pushed his head forward to take more of Will's cock in his mouth, using his hand to cover what his mouth could not. "I found the trap door," Will gripped the edge of the surgical table with white knuckles as Hannibal started bobbing his head. Hannibal went still, and Will looked down to see the bloody red eyes wearing an expectant, teasing expression under the pale veil of lashes. Will exhaled his frustration and summoned the words to continue, "when I came here while you were eating dinner with, oh fuck, with Tobias Budge," Will ducked his chin against his sweaty chest. Hannibal was dragging his tongue along the big vein under his cock, and as he reached the head of his cock he let the barest edge of his teeth dragged along the delicate skin. "I realized that the way," Will bit his lip, lolling his head back until he faced the ceiling, Hannibal pinched his inner thigh sharply until he looked back down.

Will smiled tightly, combing a hand through Hannibal's still-untamed hair, "I realized that the way you set up your dining room," Hannibal hummed, fluttering his tongue against the slit of Will's cock and Will had to bite his tongue to keep from shouting, from slamming his cock down the cannibal's throat, from coming. "It was for presentation, you were presenting your guests with something, not inviting them to understand it." Hannibal went back to unornamented bobbing until he finished the sentence, which was plenty distracting on its own. "So then I figured out what, who, you were eating," Hannibal went back to tonguing his slit, scraping his nails over the back of Will's thigh, Will felt the precipice drawing near, and smoothed his fingers over the joint in Hannibal's jaw to warn him. "I couldn't wait to try

your cooking," Will confessed. Hannibal groaned around his cock, taking Will's cock as far as he could and slipping a finger at to push gently at the skin between Will's balls and his ass. Will grabbed the table, putting his weight on his arms, and came hard.

When Will got more of a handle on his sanity and looked down, Hannibal opened his mouth, showing Will the come on his tongue, and then swallowed visibly. Will cursed, and slid to the floor in an inelegant heap, legs splayed on either side of Hannibal. Will took a deep breath, then grabbed Hannibal's ass and mustering his not-inconsiderable upper body strength, dragged the larger man into his lap.

Hannibal gave him a look that was either amused, aroused, exasperated or some blend of the three, and wove his fingers into Will's hair, tugging sharply until Will tilted his head up for a kiss. Will kissed him hard, sucking Hannibal's tongue, and Hannibal ground his hips down on Will's thighs. Will waited until Hannibal's back was arched enough to create a gap between the slope of his back and the waistband of his trousers, and slipped his hands inside to grab the meat of Hannibal's ass. Hannibal's cock was a hot line against Will's stomach and Will thought his irregular breathing was a decent sign that Hannibal wasn't too far off from coming himself. Hannibal curled his back down, craning his head to nip at Will's jaw and Will craned his head back obligingly, still shamelessly groping Hannibal's ass.

Taking pity on Hannibal, Will withdrew a hand and tugged Hannibal's trousers down enough for his cock to slip free, and began to jerk him off with vigor, figuring the time for slow teasing had come and gone while Hannibal had still been on his knees. The hand still down the back of Hannibal's pants worked between Hannibal's ass cheeks, and rubbed against his hole. Hannibal cursed in a language that was neither English nor French, and beyond that Will couldn't guess, and clenched his jaw. Will kept his strokes over Hannibal's hole gentle and slow in lieu of any lube to ease the way. "Will," Hannibal grunted perfunctorily, and Will rubbed his thumb over the slit of Hannibal's cock, and hooked his other thumb just barely inside Hannibal's ass, and Hannibal came. He seemed determined not to shout, as he had the night before, but despite his clenched jaw couldn't entirely restrain a groan through his nose.

Will hummed his pleasure, and licked the come from his hand under Hannibal's intense stare. They sat on the hard cement floor until their joints went from endorphin-loose to exertion-sore, and staggered to their feet. Will made for the stairs, but Hannibal pulled him back with his fingers in a convenient belt loop. He kissed Will with a slow thoroughness that made Will's heart speed and his eyes flutter shut. Hannibal smiled against his lips, and then climbed the stairs with a fluid rolling movement made graceful from long habit. Will scrabbled after him feeling just a little bit outclassed.

When they stood in the kitchen again, Will noted the time had edged into late morning. "I need to go home. The dogs need to go out." Hannibal nodded. "Let me get dressed," he said, "and make coffee." Will followed after him, needing to recover his clothing from the bedroom, "you're coming with me?"

Hannibal paused, turning but not far enough for Will to see his eyes. "Would you rather I not?"

"No!" Will exclaimed, his tone a little embarrassingly desperate, "I'm just. Surprised." Hannibal turned around more fully now, sliding a hand behind Will's back and pulling him

close. “I’ve only just gotten hold of you,” Hannibal told him, “I’m not ready to let go yet.” He kissed Will on the peak of his cheekbone and resumed his progress to the bedroom.

Will didn’t have an adequate response for that.

Hannibal, predictably, had an enormous walk-in closet. Will followed him with as much curiosity as a desire to watch Hannibal’s athletic body awhile longer. He wasn’t prepared to find a shelf of jeans with brand names he didn’t recognize. Hannibal saw him looking and plucked a pair from Will’s hands. He smiled, and pulled a shirt to go with them from a rack and retreated to the bathroom. Will felt like he should be panicking. He wasn’t panicking. He found his shirt and the rest of his suit would be fine balled up and relegated to a very unfortunate dry cleaner to sort out.

-x-

“My house,” Hannibal told him on Will’s porch in Wolf Trap with uncharacteristic forthrightness, “the clothes,” he paused here as if unsure how to continue, “the remind me of a life I don’t have anymore.” He locked eyes with Will, imploring him to understand. Will thought he might, it was easy to think of Hannibal as being inextricably bound up with his suits, hardwood floors, and silk sheets, but he wasn’t. Hannibal could drop anything he chose and continue on just the same man. Will envied him, a little. He liked having a consistent place to retreat to, he liked his pack of dogs.

“You look damn good in just about everything,” Will agreed, watching Buster and Acorn tussling over a thick piece of rope on the lawn. Hannibal rewarded him with the smallest smirk. Will was about to capitalize on the expression by kissing the crease that defined the apple of his cheek, when his phone rang.

“Will,” came Jack’s brusque greeting, “Abel Gideon was found dead today. You need to see this.” Will couldn’t tell him that he’d already seen him very well but he was really becoming tired of playing FBI. “There in two hours, Jack,” Will told him, letting his irritation show through.

“Go,” Hannibal said, settling into an ancient wicker chair, “I’ll watch the dogs. I can get rid of some evidence I planted in your house while you’re gone.”

Will barked a laugh that had Buster and Rocky tearing across the lawn to him to see what the game was. Hannibal picked up a well-slobbered tennis ball from beside his chair and lobbed it to get rid of them again.

Will felt his heart quake, just the littlest bit.

“I’ll be back soon,” he promised, and ducked into the house to retrieve his own fresh clothes.

-x-

It turned out that nobody had heard Gideon yelling. Nobody had heard Gideon’s professor being defenestrated. The relevant neighbor had been out of town and had only called in the

murders when he'd returned from a conference. Will felt smug they hadn't been observed but also a little disappointed he and Hannibal couldn't take more time with Alana Bloom's killer.

"Who would know Gideon would be here," Jack asked. Will hadn't heard him entering the dining room and wheeled his weight on one heel, hands shoved in his pockets, the picture of social dysfunctional inelegance. "They'd have to have anticipated Gideon would be here, he was killed after the professor and posed with no relation to his body." Jack was looking right at Will.

"A cop," Will mused not liking Jack's sudden exploration into the wilds of competency, "looking for revenge for their fallen fellow maybe." Will leaned back against the wall, "lot of bad blood for cop killers when I worked outside New Orleans." Will met Jack's gaze, minus a few inches down and to the left, the posture of a man with absolutely nothing to hide and no reason to believe he was under suspicion. "Miriam Lass's left ear was found in a locker in the Baltimore State Hospital," Jack informed him, his stance unwavering and reflecting no change in opinion on Will's guilt or innocence. "Shit," Will said, scrubbing a hand over his face in a reasonable display of sympathy. Hannibal had been a busy boy.

Will thought maybe he and Hannibal could go on a date. There was a penny pinching shelter manager Will had been meaning to filet for a while now.

"Yeah," Jack agreed, "haven't seen you at the lab the last few nights," he continued as if that was a reasonable segue, "what were you up to?" Something with an incredible alibi, Jack, Will wanted to say because what better did such a ham-fisted request deserve, but instead he scrunched his brow as if trying to remember. "Let's see," I was home with the dogs last night," he said slowly, "and I had an appointment with Dr. Lecter the night before that. We went long," he admitted making himself sound tired and drawn, "I haven't been sleeping right since Alana…" he trailed off sounding perfectly tragic.

"Yeah," Jack grunted and Will was getting pretty fucking annoyed that Jack had decided today was the day to remember professional scrutiny, "we're all really upset about what happened to Alana. It's hard." Jack's tone and expression made it obvious that Jack supposed that a jilted-almost-lover with a knack for thinking like serial killers might be a little more upset than the other cops in the department. Will didn't want to flee the country, he liked his little Wolf Trap retreat and getting dogs across the border was always a pain, but it might be worth it to kill Jack Crawford.

Chapter End Notes

hey guys had to duck out to write a brief so I'm sorry I haven't been replying to comments promptly, I swear I read them all and treasure each and every pixel. I'll get to replying as soon as this goes up. Thank you all so much for your continued attention and support, it means so much to me.

Verger

Chapter Summary

In which a plan is hatched.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Will had told Hannibal “we need to do something about Jack,” he hadn’t been expecting this. “Chilton’s in the hospital,” Hannibal told him, hands folded demurely in front of him, “it’s the perfect time for her to escape”. Miriam Lass was little more than a trembling ball of skin and protruding bone. Her left arm ended in a neatly bandaged stump.

“Honestly,” Will said thoughtfully, “I hadn’t bet on her still being alive.” Hannibal raises his eyebrows in amusement at the twist of Will’s mouth.

Will had been right about the steam tunnels being integral to Hannibal entering and exiting him home, but Miriam Lass herself had been shut into a well below Chilton’s old high school, now abandoned in favor of a newer campus. It had been part of the long game, Will had realized, because Chilton was the only other psychiatrist with a history in surgery in the Baltimore area. Neurosurgery, in Chilton’s case, but it was believable to anyone who hadn’t met the man.

“Chilton frequently releases recordings of therapy tapes,” Hannibal’s tone made it clear what he thought about that practice, “for study. The only voice Ms. Lass has heard during her stay here is his.”

“How have you kept her from seeing you?” Will asked dazedly, “How?” Will trailed off, scrubbing a hand through his curls. Hannibal reached over and smoothed his hair away from his forehead. “Lighting can be marvelous,” Hannibal explained with a fond tone. Lass’ pit had been lit by lights set below the lid of the well, the lid itself was perforated glass. Standing where he was in the dark basement, Lass couldn’t see him, only his reflection.

Hannibal sent down a bucket of food, showing Will that the lighting in the well could be made utterly blinding. Lass averted her face, hunching over and crossing her arms over her eyes.

They stood, watching Lass, a while longer. “She almost caught me,” Hannibal confessed quietly, “I would prefer she did not survive this.”

Will thought about this.

“Why stop at Chilton?” Will asked as they were returning to Hannibal’s car, parked a prudent distance away, Hannibal made a questioning noise. “Listen,” Will whispered in the dark of the forest surrounding Chilton’s old high school, and he told Hannibal his plan.

-x-

All of Will’s planning, all of his masks and his affectations, all of it goes to waste at the FBI academy. Will manages to get through the candidacy tests. His psychological profile is picture perfect, his fitness is top tier.

Then, in Will’s second year, he is involved in a shooting during a ride-along. He had been sent along with some local policemen, beat cops like Will had been, ostensibly to study how the federal and local law enforcement cooperated.

The officers he was riding with were summoned to be backup-to-the-backup in a meth lab bust. It should have been safe and removed, Will should never have been in any danger. Instead, the suspect detonates his lab and three officers inside.

The suspect flees and Will and the two officers are assigned to block off a street. Between them and the car, the suspect should’ve taken the hint and run the other way, into the arms of a SWAT team. But, he doesn’t, and Will is stabbed in the shoulder and the suspect is shot dead. All of the officers agree that Will conducted himself professionally.

But, the FBI has a standard procedure for cadet shootings and this involves intensive targeting psychological testing.

Will does not pass the tests. Will is expelled from FBI Academy.

Will has never had such a carefully thought out plan fail so completely. He spends the first day after his expulsion at home with his dogs. He does not move from his couch for the day, oblivious to the sun tracking across the sky, and fails to turn on the lights as it gets dark. It is his dogs, whining to be let out after so long inside, who break him from his reverie. Will leaves in a flurry of frantic dog bodies, walking away into the woods. The dogs are too well trained to follow.

He walks for a long time. But he eventually ends up at home again, and falls into bed. The dogs pile on top of him, panting noxiously and licking sloppily. Will is intensely, absurdly grateful for each one of his dogs.
He and the dogs move to Wolf Trap. Will gets the ramshackle house at a good price, and pays for the good deal with weeks of back breaking labor to make it liveable again. The work, the solitude, and his dogs are therapeutic. After a few months, Will stops feeling like a dark smudge on a colorful photo.

Will finishes his house, and applies for a grant to study corpses at the university. The following year, he publishes his monograph on insect activity. Will wants to celebrate with a nice bloody murder. But Will hasn’t killed anyone since he left Biloxi. At the time he had wanted to escape any scrutiny from the FBI as a new, slightly unhinged cadet. But he’s published several papers on serial killers in the mean time, and now he has a relatively well regarded monograph.

It's smarter, he thinks, not to kill anyone. The admission makes him grind his teeth.

Two years after that, Will is hired by the FBI academy as a teacher. Those that cannot do, he thinks, teach. He tries not to resent the academy for hiring him as a teacher but not an agent. He tries not to resent his idiotic students for passing tests that he can't.

It doesn't entirely work, and when one of his bright-eyed and bushy-tailed students publishes a paper that entirely misses the point of the Chesapeake Ripper but nevertheless receives serious regard from his peers, Will breaks his rule against killings.

He has a target, and is on his way to her house, when he happens upon three college students drowning puppies in a creek. Will's target is postponed.

For the first time, Will doesn't abandon the corpses to be found and instead hides the meticulously.

The papers run missing person ads for weeks. Their mothers cry about what good boys they were and various puffed up politicians talk about tragedy and community. Will laughs at the TV, because only one of those dogs had survived and any one of them was worth five of the dead boys. Even the dead dogs, he thinks bitterly.

The surviving dog is a Bassett hound with ears that drag on the ground and deep, soulful eyes. Will calls her Thimble because of how small she had been when he'd saved her. She is, arguably, his most loyal dog and he spends many evening grading papers with her heavy head resting on his thigh.

-x-

Will puts a tracker on Jack Crawford's car. The tracker relays information to Hannibal's computer, and Hannibal has rigged his rudimentary program to alert them to when Jack is within a certain distance of Hannibal's house.

Then, Will acts creepy. There's no other way to describe it, he has no purpose other than to freak Jack out. He stares to long in the lab. He sits in the dark and waits for Jack to find him. He chuckles at crime scenes where nobody but Jack can hear him. He waxes poetic about killers that don't really deserve it just to see Jack looking worried.

Will moves his knives in their harness into Hannibal's basement and replaces them with mildly risqué pornography so when Jack inevitably orders a search of his house, he is a perfectly boring teacher.

Jack stands amidst a flurry of laboratory personnel looking absolutely furious with Will. "What happened to fishing, Will?" Jack asks him with his hands on his hips. Will gives him a lazy, toothsome grin. Jack storms away to supervise some equally pointless endeavor.

Hannibal invites Jack to dinner with them. Jack, bless him, uses the opportunity to try to warn Dr. Lecter about Will.

“Ever heard of the Biloxi Wolfman?” Jack asks apropos of nothing over the soup course. “A killer some ten years ago, wasn’t he?” Hannibal replies smoothly with cool professional interest, sipping on broth made from a graphic designer. “A brutal killer,” Jack corrects him, “worse even than the Ripper.” With Jack’s focus on Hannibal, Will wiggles his eyebrows at Hannibal teasingly and mouths the word “worse” silently. Hannibal’s answering smirk is so tiny that Will wouldn’t not have noticed it even a month ago.

“They never caught him,” Will interjects brightly and Jack glowers. “You were in Biloxi during that time, weren’t you?” Jack says with embarrassingly obvious significance heavy in his tone. “Yup,” Will agrees allowing the Mississippi twang into his voice. Hannibal gives him a look that is part amused, part aroused, and part exasperated. “Lived between Biloxi and N’awlins. Killin’s happening all around,” Will makes an over-exaggerated expression of remorse.

Jack’s jaw clenches visibly.

“What about the Biloxi Wolfman, Jack?” Hannibal prompts, playing the innocent moderator. “Just thinking about unsolved cases, innocent victims.” Jack growls, staring even harder at Will, who positively beams at him in response. “Like that poor Lass girl,” Will drawls around a sip of wine. Jack goes a bit ashy. “Wonder what happened to her.”

Jack looks like he’s going to actually attack Will across the table. Will wonders if he’s regretting trying to enlist a witness in Hannibal because, to the uneducated observer, Will’s conversation is perfectly polite and Jack would be attacking him for no good reason.

Hannibal stands abruptly, breaking the tension. “Next course, I think,” he exclaims with all the reverence of a culinarian. “Something meaty, I hope,” Will calls after him.

“I’m going to catch you,” Jack rumbles. His expression is absolutely homicidal, and he’s hunched over the lip of the table like a frog. “Catch me eating Dr. Lecter’s exquisite food?” Will asks, the picture of naïve incomprehension, his voice pitched to carry into the kitchen, “That’s not hard to do. He’s an outstanding cook, I eat here whenever I can.” Then Will continues, much more quietly, “it’s so nice to spend time with someone who trusts you, isn’t it.”

“Lay one finger on Dr. Lecter,” Jack is mostly standing now, brandishing a pointer finger in Will’s face. Will rolls back his upper lip and licks his teeth. Jack looks fit to burst when Hannibal returns.

“Have I interrupted?”

“No,” Jack sits back down heavily. Hannibal sets the cheeks of a kindergarten teacher in a delicate red wine sauce in front of them and returns to his seat, smoothly directing the conversation to a new art gallery in Annapolis.

-x-

Will gives Jack a few weeks to get well and truly frustrated with him. When Jack’s team shows up to search his house again, Will figures it’s been long enough. He and Hannibal

attend a party at a fellow psychiatrist's house which, coincidentally, is a few blocks away from Jack's house. Will lets himself apparently over-indulge. Hannibal asks if there's a place he might lie down for a little while, and Will is lead to a dark room with a couch and, conveniently, a window.

Hannibal returns to the party after giving Will an absolutely pornographic kiss, and Will slips out the window. His knives are waiting in the alley behind the townhouse, and Will shucks his suit coat to shrug on the harness.

Jack's house, like the man itself, is handsome but boring. The tracker shows he is still at work so Will slips into the kitchen window. The house is dim, but still lit in anticipation of the good agent returning home. Will steals up the stairs and edges open a heavy door. "Good evening, Ms. Crawford."

Chapter End Notes

Guys I'm sorry this took so long. I love every last one of you.

Crawford

Chapter Summary

In which Jack has a bad day, but Will has a worse one.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will returns to the party out of breath, flushed with the exhilaration of his returning sprint and the honestly spectacular kill. He restores the knives to their car and scales the outside of the building to the dark room he had been left in. Hannibal is waiting and they do a few more circuits of the party, Will acting less tipsy and more embarrassed as they go. Will is flushed with adrenaline, which he is happy for people to mistake for alcohol, and when Hannibal mutters something dry about how many terrible hors d'oeuvres added up to a reasonable alibi, Will barks a laugh that it inappropriately loud.

Hannibal quiets him with smiling kiss and suddenly they are the subject of attention again. Will leans heavily into Hannibal's side, arm casually around Hannibal's waist. Hannibal makes no protest to this incursion onto his dignified demeanor, rather Will swears that Hannibal pulls Will even harder against him.

When the tracker on Jack's car informs them that he has left work to return home, he and Hannibal excuse themselves from the party.

At Hannibal's house, they shuck their party clothes and change into something better suited for a reckoning. Neither bothers to excuse himself from the other, and the changing process is interrupted on two separate occasions by wandering hands.

Hannibal is back in his dark jeans, wool coat and leather gloves. Will wears his old favorite canvas jacket and a warm flannel shirt with the knives thrown on over it. Hannibal presses up against him, hands snaking around Will's trim waist to feel the knives in their harness at his back. Will steals a kiss, tasting the wine they had drunk at the party and Hannibal beneath. Will fingers Hannibal's sleeves and the scalpels Hannibal has stored there. Neither of them should have to use their blades but it never hurts to be prepared.

Hannibal's computer pings with the alarm and Hannibal moves to it to execute a scrub of the software before grabbing Will by the wrist and dragging them out of the house. He and Will climb into Will's car just as Jack's car come barreling around the corner, and they take off towards Chilton's school.

-x-

Will is driving, both to let Jack be convinced that he has kidnapped Hannibal, and because he is trained in high-speed offensive driving. Will doesn't care what his car looks like, but maybe his father left more of an impression than Will might've believe because he's always cared about the motor. Will's rickety sedan puts out a frightening amount of power when Will demands it.

Will is braced in the seat, one foot on the gas and the other wedged between the door and the floor, one hand is on the wheel and the other on the gear shift. Hannibal has braced himself into the corner of the passenger seat, but his expression is one of a man at an entertaining card game, not one at a truly irresponsible speed on a road in poor repair.

They make the school ahead of Jack and Will spins the car to slide sideways to a stop in the crumbling parking lot, and they run for the building. Will keeps a hand on the back of Hannibal's neck and he tells itself he does so to maintain the illusion of kidnapping and not to maintain contact with the other man.

They reach the building just as Jack's car skids to a stop and Jack leaps from the car, charging after them, howling something unintelligible. Will prays he was acting rationally enough for his plan to work. He and Hannibal push themselves even harder, winded and gasping when they arrive at the well in the basement. Hannibal and Will heave open the well and toss down a ladder. Lass hesitates for a fraction of a second before she starts to climb up, Will has to admire her inner strength after so long alone in the dark.

Will and Hannibal wait impatiently for Jack, he was supposed to be here by now, but they had moved too fast through the upper level of the school. Eventually he must've caught on because Will hears him on the stairs leading into the basement. Jack fires a few wild shots into the dark basement and Hannibal pulls Will by the collar of his shirt back into the safety of the corner. The acoustics are amazing in the cement hallways, and Will swears he can hear Jack breathing like a bull long before he can see him.

Lass reaches the top of the ladder, looking around wildly for the yelling person with the gun. Jack still hasn't found them, and the plan is at risk of going belly up, so in desperation Will decides to take advantage of the acoustics. Jack is yelling for Dr. Lecter, but he goes quiet to listen for Will and Will calls Jack's name with his best mentally-damaged-product-of-nightmares voice.

"Jack Crawford?" Miriam asks, shaking on her atrophied legs, looking from Will in the corner to Jack in the hallway.

Jack wheels around at the new voice, sees a pale form in the gloom, and shoots Miriam Lass six times in the chest.

"Mr. Crawford?" Lass asks in a high, feeble voice and Jack groans. He staggers up to Lass's corpse and falls forward, his groan turning into a keening wail, and then into heaving sobs. Jack pulls Lass's corpse into his arms, hunching over her emaciated, naked body and stares into her face.

His despair reverberates deafeningly in the darkness. Hannibal and Will are waiting for Jack to move but he just sits there, tipping over the edge of madness. Jack pauses to draw breath

and Hannibal tugs Will's sleeve urgently, whispering into Will's ear, "Will, I hear sirens,"

"Fuck," Will exhales heavily, wondering why Jack had to shoot Lass in a narrow hallway and not the big room. "Fuck, okay, we need to try to get past him," Will fidgets impatiently.

"We could try to get his gun," Hannibal murmurs already edging forwards to get Jack. Will had known this was a risk, but he hadn't counted on Jack taking so long to find the basement so he'd thought it was an acceptable risk. Now it seemed anything but, it seems downright stupid.

"He may not even see us," Will whispers back, and they edge forwards in the darkness of the hallway. Jack folds forward over Lass in a fresh wave of banshee screams and Will and Hannibal make it past him.
Will starts to move faster, and something about it must attract Jack's attention because with gut-curdling clarity, Will hears a fresh magazine snap into Jack's gun, and the slide and snap of a fresh round being chambered. Jack rises to his feet, not ten yards from Will, and empties the magazine.

Will's eyes close and he's ready for the burning, razor blade pressure of the bullets, but instead he falls backwards. He becomes aware of the hot weight on him, the smell of Hannibal and blood. Will's eyes open and he sees Hannibal, slumped over him.

Blood bubbles from the corner of Hannibal's mouth. "Will," he's gasping hard, working with all of his muscle to draw air into his lungs, "Will get out of here." Will clasps Hannibal's face between his hands, his heart is thudding so fast, so loud. "Take whatever you want from my house, leave," Hannibal is becoming less intelligible by the moment, there's so much blood rushing out of him, so much hot blood. Will stares down between their bodies, at the crimson pooling on his stomach and he feels.

"No," he says quietly, "no, no, no" his voice is high and thready though he never told it to be. He feels sick, he wants to vomit. Jack's howling laughter is echoing off the walls. "No," Will hears his voice saying, over and over. "Go, Will, please," Hannibal is trying to roll himself off of Will, his arms shaking. The police sirens are clearly audible, now. "Please go," Hannibal gasps, choking around his blood and clutching his chest, "Please, Will, please go," Will realizes far too late that this is what begging sounds like. This is what world-ending sorrow feels like.

Chapter End Notes

If you're a glutton for punishment, stop here.
I love you all.

Lecter

Chapter Summary

In which a teacup comes together.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Later, Will could not recall where he found the strength. He can barely remember anything about those few hours in the interim. He remembers getting out from under Hannibal, trying hard to move fast but gently. He remembers the man's form curled sideways and looking so small on the floor of the high school. He remembers fitting a third magazine into Jack's gun, pressing the gun into Jack's hand and raising it to Jack's mouth, and pulling the trigger. Jack hadn't even fought him.

He does not remember walking to Hannibal's body with tears running freely from his eyes and dripping from his jaw. He doesn't remember pulling Hannibal's slippery, bloody body across his shoulders in a fireman's carry, and later he can't recall ever being able to carry so much weight for so long, and he can't recall tucking Hannibal into the backseat of his car and following an old, abandoned logging road away from the school to avoid the police officers on the main road.

What he does remember is driving to a hospital, the bright searing lights of the ER, and the horrified stares of the nurse at the front desk rushing to take Hannibal from him. He remember sitting by himself feeling madness tickling at the edges of his mind for hours, and then, sitting unblinkingly at Hannibal's bedside for still longer.

He remembers, with perfect eidetic clarity, Hannibal eyes drifting open. "We were going to leave Jack alive," he says quietly in the dark hospital room, "he was going to die in prison". Will cries in earnest then, his entire body shaking with the force of his breaths. "I'm sorry," he gasps out, and Hannibal isn't drugged enough to think he means he's sorry for killing Jack. Hannibal reaches out and Will takes his hand, he remembers the feeling of Hannibal's chilly hand, but he doesn't remember what Hannibal calls him though his traitorous mind can't forget that it started with an "L".

-x-

Will and Hannibal are standing in a dewy field in Lithuania. Behind them is a ramshackle cottage with a stone fireplace and, though nobody else knows they are there, the corpses of five men. In front of them is a pale white tree and at chest-height is carved, still legible even after so long, in shaky block capitals: MISHA LECTER.

The walk from the rental car to the field hadn't amounted to even a mile, but Hannibal is breathing hard. Will grabs Hannibal's arm and pulls it around his own shoulders, pulling some of the man's weight onto himself. Hannibal must truly be exhausted because he doesn't even protest, just leans heavily onto Will.

The flowers in Hannibal's other hand are untarnished, however, Hannibal did not allow himself to grip them too hard. He can't kneel to place them at the foot of the tree, and settles for tossing the flowers lightly to the ground. Hannibal heaves a sigh and winces at the pressure on his ribs. Will presses a kiss to his sweat-soaked temple.

"Sit?" Will asks him. "Not here," Hannibal answers with a dark look at the cottage. He gestures faintly across the field. "If I remember rightly, there's a creek over there," Will can't find it in himself to argue. They stagger across the field as a great, four legged monster and find that the creek is indeed still there, burbling cheerily in the pale sunlight.

Hannibal sits heavily on a large rock , sweeping his coat under himself, and starts to work open the buttons on his shirt with shaking fingers. Will cups his hands until he goes still, smiling ruefully at Will, and Will takes over until Hannibal's broad chest is exposed. Will shrugs off his backpack and pulls out the spare bandages he'd thrown in there this morning for just this reason, and starts to cut away the crimson bandage on Hannibal's chest. Only two of the bullet holes have opened again, and Will cleans and bandages them carefully. Hannibal is out of breath, but perfectly silent, never so much twitching at the pain.

Will seals the bandage, and presses a kiss to it.

"Do you want to talk about her?" he asks Hannibal as he zips up the backpack again. "I've told you about her," Hannibal says, buttoning up his shirt again. "Yeah, but," Will offers. The feeling of disliking another person's pain is new and raw. Will's eyes are averted from Hannibal's chest, he is carefully not listening to Hannibal's hoarse breathing.

"Will," Hannibal says and Will guiltily snaps his eyes up to Hannibal's bloody red gaze. Hannibal tugs him forward by his belt loops and Will goes to his knees, embracing Hannibal with exacting care and tenderness. "I'll be fine, Will" Hannibal promises him, his voice is low and muffled by Will's curls. "You better be," Will replies, face buried in Hannibal's shirt collar.

"I will be fine," Hannibal repeats, "Jack is dead, Chilton will be in prison for a very long time, and" Will feels his smile better than he sees it, "you are going to be dragged from one end of Europe to the other." Hannibal grips his jaw and pulls Will's mouth against his. Will puts all of his weight on his arms, not letting himself put any pressure on Hannibal's chest.

"Where to first, then," Will asks him and Hannibal smiles toothily.

-x-

He and Hannibal return to Baltimore after three months abroad to collect their things and sort out passports for Will's dogs. They've found a beautiful house on the outskirts of Florence.

Jack’s successor sits each of them down separately to ask about what happened to Jack. Each of them tell the tragic story of a friend under too much stress.

Jack had been implicated in the deaths of both Miriam Lass and Bella Crawford. His death is unilaterally ruled a suicide. Frederick Chilton was under investigation as a suspect of the Chesapeake Ripper murders. Will teaches a final guest lecture on the Riverside High School Incident, and it fills the Quantico auditorium from wall to wall.

Will and Hannibal are driving to Wolf Trap for the last load of stuff, when they spy a many-colored dog running along the side of the road, trailing a leash. Hannibal doesn’t even ask, just pulls the car over. Will calls the mutt “Winston”.

Chapter End Notes

Oh my god it's over I can't believe it's over. I need to edit this thing. I need to fix continuity errors both in plot and grammar (way to shift from present to past tense with wild abandon, me). So if y'all have a thing that's bugged you, please drop me a line here or my tumblr (same name over there). Drop me a line for any reason, actually, because you're all amazing beautiful humans.

As a point of curiosity, is anyone disappointed that I gave this a happy(?) ending? I really considered it but tbh I can't abide a sad ending. It just ruins me. Hungry Before We are Born, I'm looking at you (go read that it's amazing, but it will punch a hole in your heart).

I can't tell you how much it means to me that you read this from beginning to end, so from scalp to sole, let me say a heartfelt Thank You.

End Notes

YOU GUYS. YOU GUYS LOOK. LOOK AT THE GORGEOUS FANART BY BAYOBAYO

https://twitter.com/bb_artonsy/status/1123348096618917890?s=21

LOOK AT IT!!!! I'm dying thank you so much ;3;

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!